

Faith beats Fear

Going Towards Others 4

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Compromise to Connect/Take Your Story of Christ/Let Love
Lead/Faith beats Fear

Mark⁴³⁵⁻⁴¹

Jesus Stills a Storm

³⁵On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” ³⁶And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” ³⁹He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” ⁴¹And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4)

There is a wonderful piece of advice that comes from St Francis of Assisi. In relation to sharing the Gospel he once said this

Always remember to preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words.

Although this is a disputed quote it has been so helpful that the Church down through the ages has preserved it and it has done so because the Gospel has need of being shared in many ways other than just through words. When we Go to Others we need to remember this well because how well we share the Gospel depends on so much more than our words – rather, it depends on the greater reality of our lives.

Our lives always carry a great reality. What is the greater picture which others can see? [Set up short obstacle course. Walk through blindfolded – fall over. Ask volunteer to come with me. Why not?]

What was the major piece of communication in this little exercise? Why?

The reality of our life always constitutes the bigger part of any message we have to convey. If I speak to you and try to convince you to be generous and yet you know that my life is dominated by a selfishness that is obvious to all my message will be in vain. If I seek to convince you that a healthy life must include exercise and wise eating and yet I am overweight and unfit what will happen to my message? Will it be believed? No it will be rejected and I will not be trusted. If I come to you wanting to convey the importance of faith in Christ and yet I live

my life largely without having to practice faith then what will become of my message? It might well be believed but eventually my faith will be tested and in its untried state it will probably fail along with the message I want to convey.

Our communications about truth and therefore about the Gospel depend largely on the greater realities of our life. These realities determine the believability of our message. If we live like pagans whilst proclaiming the life of Christ our paganism will deeply effect the believability of our message. If we live in hate whilst proclaiming the message of love people will find the love hard to believe and hard to trust. If we live in fear whilst proclaiming the lordship of Christ people will simply not believe in Christ.

In reaching out to others it is always the case that **Faith beats Fear**, love beats lies and piety beats paganism **but only as these constitute the reality of our life**. But today, in our reading, it doesn't look like that. It looks, rather as if fear beats faith.

In our reading today Jesus climbs into a boat with His disciples to cross the lake of Galilee after a concentrated time of ministry. He's been with a large crowd all day and he's clearly tired. They climb into the boat and head across the lake. Galilee is a large lake. It's 21 kilometres long and 13 kilometres wide. It's reasonably shallow being about 43 metres at its very deepest. The Lake resides in a massive rift valley – the deepest I believe, on the surface of the earth so that the lake itself is 682 ft. below

the Mediterranean Sea and because of this the valley is quite hot and so violent storms can blow up on the lake very quickly. The storm which hits the disciples' boat is one such. Surviving such a storm in such a small boat was difficult even for such seasoned sailors as Peter, Andrew, James and John and what was worse for them was that they knew this. So when the storm blows up and begins swamping the boat and they are a long way from shore then life begins looking rather dim.

Panic sets in and they look, quite naturally, to their leader Jesus who they discover is sleeping deeply in the back of the boat. The next interaction is quite informative. The exact words recorded are these...

“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

No ‘Can you help us Jesus?’ or ‘Are you worried too Jesus?’ or ‘Shall we pray Jesus?’ No what we have here is a rebuke. ‘You don’t care Jesus – we’re about to die and all you can do is sleep!’ It provides a fascinating picture of panic and fear doesn’t it? No asking whether He can do something. No hint of consultation. No real communication – what comes out is raw fear... I want to ask you something about this scene. Tell me, what is the disciples’ reality at this point – what constitutes their world?

The storm! Yes, the storm. This is all they can see. This is all that concerns them. This is all they can think about. Nothing else

matters. Panic and, more particularly fear, has completely dominated their worlds.

And as a part of this reality doubt has crept in. Doubt about Jesus, about His love and concern for them and about His identity. Up to now they've followed the One they believe to be the Messiah. Now, in the face of this storm, all of that is being questioned. Fear has taken over. Faith has faded.

We know that because of at least two things. The first is their attitude towards the problem and the second is their attitude towards Jesus. Notice that in regard to the storm there is the sense of being overwhelmed. The storm has become everything. Nothing else matters – nothing else has relevance – nothing else can be seen by them. And this is such a dangerous place to be because when this happens we stop thinking and we resort to solutions which aren't solutions at all. This is the fruit of fear – it denies us any opportunity to think through our problems and to see things objectively. Notice that no one is recorded as even recognising Christ as a possible solution. No one says 'Hey Jesus is here – He might be able to do something?' 'Hey we're men of faith, we might call on God at this time and see what He can do.' No that would too obvious for men wouldn't it women?

Fear blinds us to so much that's obvious – even to our own attitudes... One summer night during a severe thunderstorm a mother was tucking her small son into bed. She was about to turn the light off when he asked in a trembling voice, "Mommy,

will you stay with me all night?" Smiling, the mother gave him a warm, reassuring hug and said tenderly, "I can't dear. I have to sleep in Daddy's room with Daddy." A long silence followed. At last it was broken by a sigh and a shaky voice saying, "The big sissy!"

ON a more serious note how often has fear prevented people from finding the solution – the simple solution to a significant problem? Electricity was introduced to America in the 1840's and it came to the White House early. President and Mrs. Benjamin Harrison were so intimidated by the newfangled electricity they didn't dare touch the switches. If there were no servants around to turn off the lights when the Harrisons went to bed, they slept with them on. They didn't push past their fear – they allowed it to be their world in this regard. Interestingly enough he only survived 32 days as a President before dying of pneumonia.

Again the question arises what will be our reality? Fear or Faith. It required faith for this man to press past his fears but he wasn't willing to allow Faith to become his reality. Are we?

This will be a key question for us as we go towards others. Is faith a reality for us? Is it something at the heart of how we live life? Is it our reality? Or is something else? The Bible is very clear about this.

⁶And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

(Hebs11)

Faith, then, is the true context of our message and whenever we act in or out of faith then the message will ring true to others. If, however, it is fear which characterises our life then the message of faith will have a hard time getting through us.

Now if you're feeling a little worm like at this point please don't give up. The very story we've used from the Bible today catches the disciples at one of their worst times when their faith was at a pretty low point. In it we see very human people reacting in a very human way and we also see a wonderful Saviour patient and kind, showing them that they need not have feared and that He is who He says He is.

Fear is our natural reaction. Don't worry if you too are fearful. Faith is what Christ would have us develop not just because this will strengthen our relationship with God but because when we are faithful our Going Towards Others has a context which reinforces the Gospel in every way – and sometimes, with words!