

*“Terrified?”*

[The “Fearless” video was shown immediately after the Scripture Reading before the sermon.]

The video stated, **“There is a lot of fear in this world and we all encounter fear every day.”** Obviously, terror and terrorism has been frequently on almost everyone’s minds since September 11th, 2001! Some of us have also gone through the scary years of the cold war. I recall the drills in elementary school of what to do, if a Soviet missile and nuclear bomb were headed for Fort Worth and I remember the Cuban Missile crisis. The current confrontation between President Trump and the North Koreans may provide some folks the feeling of living through those fearsome times again.

**There are a multitude of different reasons for we human beings to experience fear.** The fear of an illness and/or a death is very prominent. The fear of economic hardship is also on the mind of many people. The fear of danger, violence, and crime is powerful. The fear of being judged and rejected discourages most folks from having relationships or even visiting a local congregation. For those, who have experienced the loss of a loved one, the fear of that happening again is sometimes disabling.

One fearful event was described by Todd Weir in the following manner, “A few weeks ago I was walking with a friend on the local golf course at night. It is the perfect place to stargaze since there are no lights. To my disappointment, clouds began to move in and suddenly we noticed lighting getting very close. We somehow took a wrong turn and ended up in a place we didn’t know, just as the lighting began to surge around us. I was disoriented and felt my fear growing, as if the thunder were hammering inside my chest and the lightning was crackling through my head. I had to take a moment to calm myself and think clearly and trace a path through dark and unfamiliar territory. Fortunately, we made it out before the rains fell. But I still remember how the fear came over me and threatened to take control.” (“Don’t Be Afraid” posted on [bloomingcactus.typepad.com](http://bloomingcactus.typepad.com) by Todd Weir)

Our Scripture from Matthew reported an important occasion when the disciples of Jesus were terrified. The gospel author wrote in **verse 26, “When they saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. ‘It’s a ghost!’ they said, and screamed with fear.”** Please note, the Gospel of Luke did not report this experience. Being a physician, he was a man of science, so he may have had a problem with reporting Jesus had walked across the surface of the lake. The other Synoptic Gospel, Mark, shared the story of Jesus walking on the water but it did not include what Matthew said with reference to Peter asking Jesus to order him to join him on the water and how the eldest disciple became afraid and began to sink. Also, the Gospel of John did not report Peter’s request and Jesus saving him from drowning. Matthew, the more Jewish of the Synoptic Gospels, was closely associated with Peter, so the author or his source, may have thought this scene was a good place to report Peter’s attempt to walk on the water. Including Peter’s fear and failure had the added benefit of giving greater focus to the terror experienced that night by the disciples.

During my senior year as a Master of Divinity student at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, I wrote a Thesis titled, “A Study of Theophanies in the Old and New Testaments”. I understood a theophany to be an experience of God’s Presence through God or a representative of our Divine Parent, such as by way of an angel or God’s Son, Jesus Christ. In my thesis, I hypothesized there was and is a structure or form for theophany experiences. Part of that form is fear, which God or the Almighty’s Representative then seeks to quell through words or acts of comfort and promise. Today’s Scripture is one of those theophanies and it follows the form I wrote about in my thesis. Indeed, the disciples experienced the presence of God in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and for a moment that included fear – terror and then Jesus sought to reassure them – comfort them – quell their fear. Friends, God is present with us in this time and place and our Divine Parent and Jesus, the Son of God, both seek to liberate us from terror! The main question is: Will we allow the Still Speaking God’s Agape Love, Forgiveness, Invitation, Welcome, and

Healing to quell our fears – to usher us into the New Faith Relationship with our Divine Parent and into the New Life in Christ – the Life of the Kingdom of God?

After surprising his disciples in the boat by walking near it on the water, our Scripture reports this experience followed the theophany form or format. The disciples responded with fear – terror and then in **verse 27**, *“Jesus spoke to them at once. ‘Courage!’ he said. ‘It is I. Don’t be afraid!’”* Jesus called them and us to not give in to terror – fear – to have courage, instead! Why? How could or can Jesus’ followers do that and what does it mean to do it? Jesus identified himself to them and they recognized him as the Son of God. He also called them to not be afraid!

As we are at this point in our consideration of the Scripture, it is a good time to recall some of the message shared by the video, which we watched immediately after the Scripture Reading. Recall how, after lifting up some of the fears we experience, it went on to reveal: “When we walk in courage, we have hope. Our hope must be in that which cannot be destroyed – something that cannot be altered – something that remains constant in this ever changing world. ... Our hope must be in him who holds the world together. ...” **“In him who promises to never leave us or forsake us. In him who vows to give us hope and a future. In him who has great plans for us. My hope is in Christ alone”** “... Trust in the Lord with all your heart ...”

Putting our hope – our faith in Jesus Christ is not just the message of the video but also of our Gospel Lectionary Reading for today. Matthew reported in **verse 33**, *“Then the disciples in the boat worshiped Jesus. ‘Truly you are the Son of God!’ they exclaimed.”*

It is interesting how Mark’s account concludes differently and reveals more of the difficulty the disciples had with fully putting their hope – their faith in Jesus. It was reported in **Mark 6:31-32**, *“Then he got in to the boat with them, and the wind died down. The disciples were completely amazed, because they had not understood the real meaning of the feeding of the five thousand; their minds could not grasp it.”* Many of us were here last Sunday when we studied the Feeding of the 5,000 and I pointed out that in the Gospel of John, Jesus instructed some of the 5,000 bread eaters about the true meaning of his feeding of the 5,000. The Feeding was to serve as a precursor of the Messianic Feast of the Fulfilled Kingdom of God and it was to reveal Jesus Christ is the Son of God – the Bread of Life – the real Bread from Heaven!

God through the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, is always speaking to us – calling us to not be afraid and to put our trust – faith in our Crucified and Risen Savior. When scary things are happening in our lives, we need to put our hope in God and God’s Son, Jesus! We are able to put our faith and hope in him and our Divine Parent because of God’s Agape Love shown for us in the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Only Son of God. Furthermore, each of us are to be agents of the Still Speaking God’s Love to all people – to everyone who is hurting. **When someone is hurting, demonstrate love and support for that person.** You can be a supportive listener. You can bring comfort in many different ways. One way is to be a CROP Walk volunteer and/or donor. Another is to be a Worship Leader as Nichole is our Lay Liturgical Leader today and the Chancel Voices returned to sing their anthems. Or, when you observe a family member, friend, coworker, or even an acquaintance struggling with meaning, purpose, and value in their lives you can share Christ’s invitation to worship and be in the New Faith Relationship with our Divine Parent and be present to encourage and support them in their Faith Journey. Are you terrified? Instead, put your trust and hope in God and Jesus, have courage and live unafraid – be an agent of God’s Love and Comfort. Amen.