

**Fourth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX**  
**20 June 2021**

**Mark 4:35-41**

5-year old Johnny was in the kitchen as his mother made supper. She asked him to go into the pantry and get her a can of tomato soup, but he didn't want to go in alone. "It's dark in there and I'm scared." She asked again, and he persisted. Finally, she said, "It's OK--Jesus will be in there with you." Johnny walked hesitantly to the door and slowly opened it. He peeked inside, saw it was dark, and started to leave when all at once an idea came to him, and he said: "Jesus, if you're in there, would you hand me that can of tomato soup?" (Charles Allen, *Victory in the Valleys*.)

This cute little joke illustrates a powerful truth: we live in a world filled with fear and anxiety. The author Fraser Kent gives us a list of the types of phobias discovered in the last 100 years: Peladophobia: fear of baldness and bald people. Aerophobia: fear of drafts. Porphyrophobia: fear of the color purple. Chaetophobia: fear of hairy people. Levophobia: fear of objects on the left side of the body. Dextrophobia: fear of objects on the right side of the body. Auroraphobia: fear of the northern lights. Calyprophobia: fear of obscure meanings. Thalassophobia: fear of being seated. Stabisbasiphobia: fear of standing and walking. Odontophobia: fear of teeth. Graphophobia: fear of writing in public. Phobophobia: fear of being afraid. (Fraser Kent, *Nothing to Fear*, Doubleday & Company, 1977).

Even though many of our fears are irrational and make no sense, they still have the power to enslave us, to affect our activities of daily living, to isolate us, and to influence our relationships with others. Most people, however, suffer from realistic fears. The wind threatening to capsize our boats is all too real. This is very apparent today when so many are still dealing with the loss of employment, loss of loved ones, and perhaps the loss of health left by the Covid-19 Pandemic. Many around the world are still dying and suffering the effects of this terrible disease. Now, we hear that many are deeply worried about foreclosures, evictions, and homelessness as Covid protections are lifted up around the country. Many of us worry about rising college tuition and we begin to face the real possibility that our children may not be able to afford college. And many are suffering record levels of depression and anxiety. Americans feel less optimistic about our future and there is still great fear of terrorism both domestic and foreign.

The truth is that science and technology have failed to give us peace of mind. In fact, what scares us now is vastly most sinister than what used to scare us 30 or 60 years ago. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University reported a comparison of what scared school kids in 1960, 1990, and 2020. The greatest fears of grade school children in 1960 were: 1) Animals, 2) Being in a dark room, 3) High places, 4) Strangers, and 5) Loud noises. In 1990, kids were afraid of the following: 1) Divorce, 2) Nuclear war, 3) Cancer,

4) Pollution, 5) Being mugged. (Back to the Bible Today, Summer, 1990, p. 5.) In 2020 kids were worried about, 1) Death, 2) The Corona Virus killing off their parents, 3) Hospitals, 4) Losing their homes or becoming homeless, and 5) never being able to go back to school. And children are not alone in their fears. I don't know what tops the list in 2021 for you, but I know what some of my top fears are: 1.) The return of a Pandemic, 2.) Cyber Terrorism, 3.) The increasing polarization in our country, 4.) Environmental Disasters, and 5.) The loss of financial security (a stock market crash or a recession.)

Back in the 1960s, parents could help their children face their fears by teaching them to avoid the things and places that scared them. Unfortunately, there is little we can do about what scares us today. The average person on the street has little say about international policy, we have no power over nuclear proliferation, and our environmental activism is at best a symbolic action, as the big offenders are seldom held accountable for their actions. You add to these our normal everyday stress, our lack of direction, our lack of meaningful relationships, our grief or sadness, fear of illness and loss of mobility, and our fear of premature death. At the end of the day, what we get is an overwhelming number of fears and anxieties that threaten to consume our lives.

No wonder Americans spend billions of dollars every year in antidepressants, anxiolytics, and sleep aides. Today, Jesus asks the scared disciples in the boat, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" The speechless disciples have no answer, but murmur among themselves about Jesus' power. They say, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" I believe that the solution to all of our fears is found in the answer to this question. "Who is Jesus for us?" If we believe that he is the Messiah of the world and Lord and Savior over everything that is, then we must also believe that our very lives are in his hands. Paraphrasing Paul, Jesus did not give us a spirit of temerity or fear, to fall back into the slavery of our daily anxiety. He has given us at Baptism a spirit of power, a spirit of confidence, a spirit of absolute reliance on his love for us. If we believe that Jesus has the power to calm the storms of our life, then we will pray with confidence, "Your will be done and earth as it is in Heaven".

Much about our future may be uncertain, but one thing is absolutely certain: God loves us greatly and he will see us through these dangerous and stress-producing times. Jesus knew this well. This is why his preferred prayer asks, "Deliver us from all anxiety". The problem is not that Christ is unwilling to come into our hearts and give us the peace of mind and heart that he promised to his disciples, when he said, "My peace I give to you, my peace I leave you." The problem is that many of us don't have enough faith to ask him with confidence: "God come into my life with the amazing power of your Holy Spirit and help me to surrender all my fears and anxieties to you. Liberate me from anything that binds me and keeps me from trusting in you." Christ teaches his disciples not only in parables, but also through his amazing acts and miracles. The message is clear; He has power and dominion over everything in creation, he has the power to help us conquer anything that chains us and enslaves us. Nothing either in our physical or in our spiritual realm can separate us from his love or can ever defeat him. If we open our

hearts to him, and surrender our lives to his will, he will give us freedom unlike anything we have ever experienced.

The disciples learned this message well after Pentecost. They were so filled with the power of the Holy Spirit that they boldly preached the Gospel, even in the most inhospitable of places. They had such joy and such freedom, that they became a perfect example to the world of what perfect freedom and absolute dependence on the Lord look like. Neither persecution, not torture, nor death could diminish their joy and their confidence in Christ. His love for them and his power working within them helped them to organize their priorities, to conquer all their fears, and to risk deeper relationships with their brothers and sisters.

My brothers and sisters, many of us are like Don Quixote de la Mancha, frantically fighting our own imaginary monsters. But I am here to remind us that love conquers all fears, whether real or imagined. We don't have to be an "army of one" heroically fighting alone against everything that produces anxiety. Christ is in the boat, Christ is with us, Christ is in his church, Christ is in his world, and we are not alone. We are "in the boat" together. We are in a "Nave" of a church. The word "Nave" comes from the Latin, "Navis," from which we get "Navy." The word is translated as "Ship" or "Boat." So, even today, here, and now, we are all in the boat together and Christ is in charge. The Church is his boat, and he will see it through the rough seas.

I invite all today to relinquish our fears and to place them in Christ's hands. He longs to give us freedom because there is no enemy that he hasn't already conquered. Ours is a powerful Redeemer and as long as we let him be in the boat with us, he will see us through all of the storms of our life. Amen!