

June 30, 2024  
Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

“Not Fearing”

Mark 5:21-43

“Pay attention to your fear” is usually some pretty sound advice. If I had done so more as a teenager, I would have avoided doing some pretty stupid things and no small number of physical injuries. Fear will keep one from walking into dangerous situations. Fear causes you to take necessary precautions for safety. Fear can spur you toward needed action, sometimes with strengths or abilities you didn't even know you possessed. In a lot of ways, fear is a gift of God that benefits you and those you love.

But what good is fear in a situation over which you have no control? Not much. Such fear doesn't lead anywhere except anxiety, panic and despair. It is into this helpless fear that Jesus says to Jairus, *“Do not fear, only believe.”*

Good fear had done its work on Jairus. He feared for his daughter's life and that fear sent him to Jesus. But then word came that his daughter had died and Jairus was afraid in the face of death, something against which he could do nothing. Something against which, it would seem, he thought Jesus could do nothing.

*“Do not fear, only believe.”* Jesus encourages Jairus' faith. His faith receives Christ's raising of his daughter from death.

It's ironic that the faith of a wealthy man and esteemed leader of the synagogue needs encouragement while a lowly, broke and ceremonially unclean woman barred from the synagogue has no such doubt and fear: *“If I touch even his garments, I will be made well.”* She is one of those few people whose faith receives Christ's praise.

I say all this by way of encouragement, because Christ speaks these words not just for Jairus, but for all people who call on His name in faith. *“Do not fear, only believe.”*

These are not empty words. This is not like when a person is mourning the loss of a loved one and somebody says, “Everything happens for a reason.” That's no comfort; somebody is dead. Even if there is a reason, there is still the death and it's evil and it's fearful. But when Christ is added to the mix, death is defeated. The pain of loss remains, but fear is replaced by certain hope in the coming resurrection.

But these words of Jesus aren't exclusively for funerals. These words apply to everything of this world that may cause you helpless fear—and boy there sure seems to be a lot of things to cause that kind of fear these days!

With increasing prices many fear not being able to put food on the table or being able to handle an unforeseen large expense like a major car repair. People fear being able to afford or insure a home. We've almost grown accustomed to fear of terrorist attacks, but more and more we fear war breaking out on a global scale involving our country's troops. We fear for our society as patriotism, family values, morality and common sense seems to be crumbling. We fear the evil that seems more and more commonplace both far and near—last weekend a woman was shot less than 2000 feet from my front door in Bayou Blue...and they still haven't found the shooter!

Other, closer fears tear at our heart and soul. We fear as close relationships unravel, spouses or family become estranged and we can't seem make amends. We fear being alone. We fear for our loved ones who have wandered from the faith. We fear the consequences of those sins we just can't seem to eradicate from our lives. We doubt God and fear our own faith is lacking. We fear the decay and eventual death creeping toward us.

*“Do not fear, only believe.”*

These are not empty words. Jesus has already accomplished the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the live everlasting. Just as these words of encouragement pointed Jairus past the death of his daughter to promise in Christ, they guide you beyond the impossible brokenness of this fallen world to that healing that stands achieved by Christ. Much of these fearful things are indeed out of your control, but they aren't beyond Christ!

And I'm not being trite here, saying “Everything is going to be okay” as if you should have no concern at all. You are in this world where a lot of very concerning evils are happening. But fear? Fear of what we can't control? That really has no place with us. We have a Savior, a King and brother in the flesh who has made it perfectly clear that He sees us safely through this mess of a world; through the mess that is our own fallen nature. A lot of it is not pleasant, but we face it with faith, not fear. There is no reason for fear.

I know I sound like a broken record up here week after week, but peace comes in getting your focus off of yourself and your world and up to the Savior reigning over it all at the Father's right hand. The promises of God are rock-solid in Christ, and Christ is where your fears are brought to an end.

Jeremiah the prophet penned Lamentations when there seemed to be a lot to fear for the people of God. Jerusalem had fallen and been wiped off the map. The Jews were exiles in the land of Babylon. Jeremiah himself had lived a life of being rejected, beaten, imprisoned and even placed in the stocks. Ultimately he would be forced against his will to go to Egypt where he presumably died. But His words before us today speak the truth of faith in fearful times.

*“Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him; let him put his mouth in the dust—there may yet be hope; let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, and let him be filled with insults. For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men.”*

These words remind me of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. Was He concerned about what He was about to undergo? Most certainly. He prayed there, “*Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.*” But was He afraid—afraid that the whole thing would not result in resurrection and divine glory? Not at all! Jesus knew the heart of the Father! Jesus has the heart of the Father, and it is indeed steadfast love that is faithful to every promise. There was no fear in Christ that anything was out of control.

It is the same for us. Not perfectly of course, we still fear when we shouldn't. But we should be comforted and those fears calmed when we dwell on the God of our salvation. Troubles and evils abound in this world. Some of our afflictions may even be by the hand of God Himself, He does kind of have a track record for that! But, enduring in faith in Christ, there is absolutely no need to fear.

The God who is in control of all of it loves you. He has spoken His love to you, washed you of your sin in the blessed, loving waters of baptism, feeds you His love incarnate in the body and blood of Christ. He has died for you. He has risen for you. And after this short time of affliction is done He will raise you to life again in His perfect glory. “*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end.*” This is most certainly true.

When dread and anxiety overtakes you because things seem out of your power, take your mind, heart and soul to the steadfast love of Christ who controls all things forever and “*Do not fear, only believe.*” Amen.