

Pentecost 5 / June 27, 2021

Mark 5:36

“Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, ‘Do not fear, only believe.’”

Word spread about Jesus and the wonderful power of His words. As He left one crowd on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, another waited for Him on the other side. Word traveled faster than He did! People sought Him for help, healing and well being. Some sought to hear Him speak. His words had a power that was compelling, convincing and hard to resist. He spoke with an air of authority that was unmatched by their most famous teachers. Many sought Jesus, the crowd in our gospel pressed against Him. The disciples were incredulous when Jesus stopped and asked, *“Who touched my garments?”*

Many people sought Jesus, but Mark focuses on two in our gospel; a woman with a chronic bleeding problem and a man whose daughter was on death’s door step. Both had fears, both had faith Jesus could help them. Both came to Jesus despite their fears and in their fear, Jesus drew them close by His powerful word, showed Himself their God and Saviour. Jesus stands with us in our fears, struggles and hardships of life. He draws us close in the power of His word, gives us peace and says to us as He said to them, *“Do not fear, only believe.”*

Do you have fears? We are not supposed to fear, right? Fear is an affront to faith, isn’t it? At the conclusion of last week’s gospel Jesus chastised the disciples for their fear, saying, *“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”* Fear and a lack of faith seem to go hand in hand. But it’s not as simple as it seems, because on the other hand, the book of Proverbs says, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”* Furthermore, in the letter to the Philippians, St. Paul urges us to *“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you.”* There is a faithless fear and there is a fear that focuses our faith on God in Christ.

As soon as she touched Jesus’ garment, the woman was healed. When Jesus asked who touched Him, she came to Him *“in fear and trembling”* and confessed that she was the one who had touched Him. She needed a lot of faith to overcome her fears. But, Jesus didn’t chastise her. He called her a daughter, blessed her and said to her, *“Your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease.”* The dynamic between fear and faith is not as simple as it seems. There is a fear that doubts and despairs. There is a fear that clings to Jesus. There is a faith that expresses itself in fear and trembling. The person who fears and trembles and clings to Jesus as Saviour is the person who is blessed to hear Him say, *“Your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease.”*

Fear is part of life and an essential part of self-preservation. Fear balances risk taking with common sense. Fear may once have helped you overcome temptation and prevented you from putting your tongue on a metal pole in minus 30-degree weather. There are many things in life that we should fear. Fear has an important place in our lives as believers. We should fear sinning against the Lord and grieving the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. In Psalm 19 King David prayed, *“Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me.”* We should fear offending one another, for we are all members of the body of Christ and the Holy Spirit dwells within all of us. We should especially fear causing a fellow believer to stumble in their faith. We should fear putting ourselves in situations where we will be tempted to sin. We exercise our faith by facing our fears with the power of Christ. We express our faith by resisting fear and overcoming our doubts, by turning to the instruction of God’s word, seeking the nourishment of the sacrament and the support of fellow believers in the body of Christ.

United States President Franklin Roosevelt was trying to restore the public’s faith in the US. Financial system. In a speech he famously declared, *“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”* But, if we had nothing to fear, why would we need faith? If there was nothing to fear, how could we take the proverbial ‘leap of faith?’ Consider the exponential growth in faith after the disciples saw Jesus calm the storm and then in great fear, asked each other, *“Who is this man?”* In their fear they saw Him in a different light and believed in Him in a deeper way.

Consider the fear and trembling of the woman in our gospel! Imagine the fear in her heart as she moved through the crowd. Her bleeding made her ritually unclean. She was unable to take part in the religious life of the faith community. She was forbidden to gather with crowds. Any person with whom she came into contact would also have been made unclean. She wouldn’t have been a popular person, if she had been recognized breaking quarantine and coming to Jesus. She hoped no one would notice as she drew near, reached out and touched Jesus’ garments. Fear focused her faith on Jesus, so she found the courage to come and to reach out for healing. Fear made her strong, so she had the faith to stand up and admit she was the one who touched Jesus’ garment. The Holy Spirit doesn’t cast us away because of our fears. He leads us to Jesus, who in our fears shows Himself as our God and Saviour and gives us the faith to believe saying, *“Do not fear, only believe.”*

Never underestimate the relationship between fear and faith. Fear didn't keep the woman from Jesus. It gave her faith focus! Fear brought the synagogue ruler to Jesus, to seek healing for his daughter. Synagogue rulers didn't tend to think highly of Jesus. He broke their rules, by healing the sick and casting out unclean spirits on the Sabbath. They kicked people who followed Him out of their synagogues. Most synagogue rulers wouldn't have wasted their time coming to see Jesus. He meant nothing to them. In their minds, He was nothing more than a trouble maker and disturber of the peace. They weren't afraid of Him. They felt disdain for Him. Possibly this synagogue ruler also felt that way about Jesus at one time. Fear changed the way he saw Jesus! He was driven to Jesus by fear, fear that his daughter was dying. No one had been able to help. Now she was at the point of death. Jesus was his only hope. He swallowed his pride, set aside his prejudices, "*fell at His feet and implored Him earnestly, saying, 'My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.'*" Fear is a good thing when it leads us to Jesus!

But as they were making their way to the house, there was a delay. Jesus suddenly stopped and asked, "*Who touched me?*" He stood stone still, waiting for someone to step forward. The crowd was pressing against Him, what was He talking about? Everyone around Him was bumping and jostling. Then a woman came forward and they had a conversation. Another delay! Time was running out; his daughter was dying and Jesus stopped to talk. His heart sank in an ocean of despair when messengers came from his house and said, "*Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?*" This was the sum of all His fears! He was drowning, but then Jesus reached into the depths of His despair and said, "*Do not fear, only believe.*" There is a tension between fear and faith, which Jesus uses to draw us closer to His heart and make our faith stronger in the knowledge that He is our God and Saviour.

Jairus took Jesus' words to heart and continued walking with Jesus, but I imagine he was filled with dread, every step of the way. Jesus healed the sick, but what could He do for the dead! Despite his fears, Jesus' words gave him a glimmer of hope and something to cling to, as he drifted on an ocean of despair, "*Do not fear, only believe.*" He wanted to believe just like another man who said to Jesus, "*I believe, help my unbelief.*" Jesus' words gave him encouragement in his soul and gave him hope in his fear. Jesus took away the sum of his fears when He took his daughter by the hand, raised her up and said, "*Talitha kumi, '... 'Little girl, I say to you, arise.'*"

The people who laughed at Jesus when he offered them comfort, assuring them, "*The child is not dead, but sleeping,*" were doubtless amazed when the child got up and walked; though some may have said, 'I guess she was sleeping.' Some may have believed, but no one believed more firmly that Jesus was the Saviour and Son of God than Jairus, who came to Jesus with fear, walked with Him in dread and stood with Him at his daughter's deathbed, trembling with sorrow. At the end of the day there was at least one synagogue ruler in Israel, who knew Jesus was Lord and was not afraid to tell everyone what He had done for him. Jesus forms our faith in the midst of our fears, struggles and hardships. He makes our faith stronger and more resilient, through perseverance and trust. He will bring our faith to the most beautiful and amazing fulfilment on the last day, when He will say to us as He said to Jairus' daughter, "ARISE!"

Fear is spoken of variously in scripture. There is the fear of fools who rush in where angels fear to tread. There is the fear of respect, by which we honour God for His forgiveness. There is the fear of a small faith that realizes it doesn't know as much as it thought. This was the fear of the disciples caught in the storm in last week's gospel. There is the fear that worships at Jesus' feet for His salvation. What are your fears? Where does your faith need to be strengthened through knowledge and understanding?

In today's gospel fear is something through which the Holy Spirit draws us to Jesus that we may receive help in our lives and healing in our bodies. Most importantly, fear is something the Holy Spirit uses to focus our faith on Jesus, so that we would believe more firmly and know more certainly that He is our God and our Saviour, who loves us dearly as children and who saves us to eternity. God grant us faith to believe, until faith passes into sight, and we see that in Christ we have nothing to fear! In Jesus' Name. Amen