

Mark 4:35-41

One of my favourite comedians is Peter Kaye and between 2002 and 2005 he made a series of adverts for John Smith's Bitter. The idea was he was a no-nonsense northerner who tells it like it is. Here is Peter out for a meal and the babysitter rings up because his daughter "Brittany" is having nightmares.

(Play clip) You can catch them all here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5wt7uPhsAk>

As any parent knows if a child is having a nightmare you sooth them, calm them down and tell them there's nothing to be afraid of.

Which isn't true.

There are actually lots of things we are afraid of and some for good reason.

A theme running in Mark's Gospel is that of faith and fear – it's in today's scripture and in next weeks. What are we afraid of?

Isolation, pain, meaninglessness, rejection, losing one's job, money problems, failure, illness and death. The death of someone we love and our own.

So what should we say to a child with a nightmare or someone who is afraid? What do we learn from the disciples experience?

Earlier in the day Jesus had used a boat to float a little way offshore and teach and preach to the crowd. I imagine it's the same boat he hops into much later that day. It's now evening and Jesus is exhausted. His fishermen disciples can handle crossing the lake themselves; Jesus takes a little nap.

Out of nowhere, and this is geographically accurate it still happens, a violent squall threatens them, so violent that the disciples are in fear of their lives, they have good reason to be afraid BUT...they are not on their own out there.

The rescue isn't from one of the other boats (there were others with them) but from Jesus who carried on sleeping. On being wakened he commands the wind and the waves to be quiet and to be still.

Our first lesson today is to always remember we are not alone. What we say to a child with a nightmare is, don't be afraid, you are not on your own.

For a little while when my middle child was 6 or 7 she would be upset to think she was awake and we all might be asleep. She would knock on the bedroom door and say "Dad don't go to sleep before me" – and I re-assured her I would be reading for a while and make sure she was asleep before I went to sleep. That's all the re-assurance she needed.

As we grow in faith we come to realise that fearsome things are real but they do not have the last word. They do not have ultimate power over us because reigning over this world of fearsome things is one who is mightier than they are. He is able to quieten the noise of fearsome things and make everything still. Do not be afraid, you are not alone.

Out of this story comes one of the great questions.

Don't you care?

Specifically in the story it's "don't you care if we drown?" but we could ask the same when those fearful things are swirling round us, threatening us, frightening us.

Where are you God? Don't you care?

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I think one of the most difficult things to grasp and absorb into our faith and our thinking and our living is that God really does love and care for us.

It's tempting to point at all the problems and difficulties and challenges we face and say "doesn't God care"? Why can't I have a life without fearsome things???

Jesus answers, why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?

How on earth can we overcome the things that bother us? Through faith – not summoning up some hidden courage or remembering lessons we have forgotten but placing our faith in Jesus Christ.

We are not exempt from life's difficulties (and I could list all the ones I know about from the church community) yet through faith in Jesus Christ each and every problem becomes a means of his Grace.

Matt Redman expressed it this way "Our scars are a sign of grace in our lives". Not our successes – the scars. Faith in Jesus Christ transforms our experience of life's storms, we are not alone, have faith in Christ who is with us; the one who makes fearsome things quiet and still.

You would think the disciples would respond to their immediate and complete rescue with whooping and hollering and high fives all round. Actually, we are told they were terrified!

Being terrified happens most often in the Bible when an appears. The first thing these Angels are taught in Angel school is that they have to say straight away – don't be afraid.

Think of the Shepherds in the Christmas Story. Terrified.

Zachariah in the temple. Terrified.
Even Mary Jesus Mother. Terrified.

Clearly their appearance brings about Terror.
But Jesus is just ordinary looking like we are, so there's nothing about him to make the disciples afraid, and the miracles and healings and wonders he had done hadn't upset the disciples like this.

But the demonstration of his power over nature terrifies them.

Jesus says. Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?

Is the fear he is referring to their fear at the storm or the fear they feel as they witness His power over the storm??

Why did they wake him up in the first place?
They were afraid and wanted him to save them.
And he does, but the natural and obvious fear at a terrible storm is surpassed by fear of someone who has power over it.

The Old Testament tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, (proverbs 1:7) however "fear" which has quite a narrow meaning in our vocabulary is actually used to translate 15 Hebrew nouns and 10 verbs – so it's not surprising it's one of the words that misleads us. Reverent awe would be a better and more helpful translation. God doesn't intend for us to be "afraid" of him, to tremble at his power, to have that sense of reverent awe and wonder will come naturally.

In this story the disciples are genuinely terrified because they have not yet fully grasped who Jesus is and understood he is FOR them.

Jesus challenge to the disciples and us is this – fear or faith?

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The Gospel of Mark repeats the question that ends our reading.

Who is this?

He invites us to look closely at Jesus Christ, to examine his words and actions and poses the question. Fear or faith?

Faith is an active commitment. We might recall our confirmation when we publicly declared our faith in Jesus Christ, but the reality is to live that faith commitment and renew it every single day.

Faith is not wishing that all the fearsome things will be removed, but trusting in the one who has power over them. It's to remember each day and each moment. I am **not alone** and **he is on my side**.

Revd. Jon Hutchinson, 20 June 2021