
FROM FEAR TO FAITH

What moves us from fear to faith?

- Hold on to that question for a moment; I'll come back to it.

For now, though, notice that while we consider fear and faith to be very different responses, they actually are very similar.

- Both fear and faith make sense only in relation to something unknown, challenging, difficult, or threatening.
 - I mean, it's just those kinds of things that make us afraid.
 - And, when you stop to think about it, it's those very same kinds of things that summon faith to face them.

Indeed, in the face of things unknown, challenging, difficult, or threatening, it seems the clear choice in front of us is fear or faith.

At least, that's the way things seem to be characterized in today's story about JESUS' stilling of the storm.

- By the end of the story, JESUS has called out the disciples' fear and asked them why they don't have faith.

Now I want to be cautious about making such a hard distinction—either faith or fear—because I believe that faith doesn't so much as banish fear as it does to make it possible to cope with it.

- At the same time, though, it does feel like “responding in fear” or “responding in faith” are two very different responses to the same situation.
 - And maybe that's the issue: not whether you're afraid, but how you respond.

Which brings me back to my original question: what moves us from fear to faith?

- Or at least, what enables us—even if we are afraid of something unknown, challenging, difficult, or threatening—to act in faith rather than be paralyzed by fear?

What struck me in this passage this week is that, interestingly, it's not the miracle that JESUS performs that makes the difference.

- Indeed, the disciples seem almost more afraid than they did previously.
 - *They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey HIM!”*
 - Perhaps it's shifted from a fear of dying—“Don't YOU care if we drown?”—to more of a holy awe—“Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey HIM!”
 - It leads me to wonder if the level of fear has truly changed.

I think this is interesting because we tend to think that faith would be easier to find if we just had a miracle or two to call it into existence or bolster and encourage it.

- But that's not the case here.
- Indeed, it's not the case throughout Mark's gospel, even to this point and beyond.
 - The disciples have witnessed many, many miracles so far—yet they still don't know what to expect from JESUS or even who HE is.
 - Miracles, as it turns out, don't really make the difference.

There's a poignant scene in the otherwise very violent film *Pulp Fiction*, when two hitmen, Jules and Vincent, are trying to come to terms with their narrow escape from death.

- Jules describes their experience as a miracle; Vincent disagrees.

After defining a miracle as “GOD making the impossible possible,” Vincent argues that their escape from death doesn’t qualify.

- Which prompts Jules to say, “Don’t you see, Vincent, that...doesn’t matter. You’re judging this thing the wrong way. It’s not about what. It could be GOD stopped the bullets. HE changed the Coke into Pepsi. HE found my car keys. You don’t judge [stuff] like this on merit. Whether or not what we experienced was an “according to Hoyle” miracle is insignificant. What is significant is that I felt GOD’s touch. GOD got involved.”
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“I felt GOD’s touch. GOD got involved.”

- Something similar, I think, is happening in today’s story.
 - The shift in the disciples’ reaction—from “*Don’t YOU care if we drown?*” to “*Who is this?*”—signifies a shift from what: the miracle—to who: JESUS.
 - Which leads me to conclude that perhaps the answer to our question—What moves us from fear to faith?—is relationship.
 - It’s the move from what to who, from event to person, from ambiguous miracle to the actual source of it: JESUS.
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Gregory Boyle is a Jesuit priest and the founder of Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles.

- Homeboy Industries is the largest gang intervention, rehabilitation, and reentry program in the world.
- Father Gregory just received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Biden for his work through Homeboy.

Father Gregory, or G as the homies call him, tells of a conversation he had with Chuy.

- Chuy needs help getting a refrigerator.

For a long time, Chuy has been a big, bad gang member and drug dealer.

- Chuy says, “I was disguised as that guy.”

Chuy started working at Homeboy, as all do, in janitorial services, and then in the tattoo removal department.

- After eighteen months, he got a good-paying job with the help of Homeboy’s employment services department.

But now he needs help getting a refrigerator, so he texts Father Gregory who tells him to meet him at Sears at 4:30.

- “Got it,” Chuy texts back. “Beers at 4:30.”
 - “He got jokes”—as the homies would say.

They get the refrigerator and as Father Gregory is driving him home, Chuy says that lately, he’s “been having one-on-ones with...you know...GOD.”

- “I don’t understand it,” he says as he turns and looks at G. “The DUDE shows up.”
 - Father Gregory chuckles at first and then sees that Chuy is as serious as can be.
 - “I mean...why would HE do that?” tears beginning to run down his cheeks.
 - “After all the [junk] and bad stuff I’ve done, why would HE show up.”

Chuy has plenty of reasons to fear GOD and GOD’s judgment.

- But through Homeboy Industries and Father Gregory, Chuy has found the miracle of relationship and through relationship, he has found faith.
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Faith, in the end, isn’t believing certain theological teachings about when or how GOD created the earth, whether or not Jonah lived in the belly of a whale, the nature of Scripture’s authority, or even Mary’s marital status when JESUS was born.

- Rather, faith is about a relationship—a relationship with GOD revealed by the ministry and words and actions of JESUS.

And in Mark's Gospel, the JESUS we meet is relentless in HIS pursuit of caring for all of GOD's children.

- The very crossing of a rough sea is prompted by JESUS' determination to get to the other side, to the land of the Gerasenes, a place few rabbis, or any Jews for that matter, would venture.
 - There JESUS will meet and heal a man possessed by a demon and return him to the community from which he has been ostracized.
 - And then JESUS will come back to more familiar places to heal again, this time restoring life to a young girl, and healing a woman who has been suffering for more than a decade.
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These early chapters of Mark describe again and again JESUS' determination to free people from all that keep them from the abundant life GOD promises:

- demon possession, disease, social exclusion, hunger, even death itself.
- JESUS reveals a GOD who cares passionately for the well-being of all GOD's people.
 - This is the ONE we are invited to trust.
 - And trust, faith, in the end, is the only thing that overcomes fear.

Ultimately, you see, the question isn't what moves us from fear to faith, but who?

- And the answer is JESUS, the ONE who will not rest until we see and hear and experience and trust GOD's passionate love for us and all the world.

And there is a second "who" involved as well, for when we have a hard time trusting, a hard time believing like Chuy that, despite our shortcomings GOD still loves us or, for that matter, despite those times of bad choices or struggle or pain or loneliness, GOD is still present in our lives.

- And it is in these times that we gather as a community and read again these stories that we remind ourselves and each other of GOD's promises.
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And this is what is interesting, Christians and today especially, confirmands.

- When we gather together and remind each other of GOD's steadfast love, we are stepping into the biblical story to play one of the great roles of Scripture.
 - For at critical times across biblical drama, apostles, angels, and prophets were, are, and will be sent to the people of GOD to say four powerful yet simple words that constitute the most frequently repeated command and promise in the Bible: *Do not be afraid.*
 - And each time we hear and say those words, we join all those saints who went before us, caught up in the SPIRIT OF GOD:
 - people who find the courage, not just to survive, but to flourish;
 - not just to live, but to live with abundance;
 - and not just to get by, but knowing the favor we enjoy in and through CHRIST,
 - to ask for great things, expect great things, dare great things, receive great things, and share great things.
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Richard Rohr was right: "We don't think ourselves into a new way of living.

- "We live ourselves into a new way of thinking."
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Relationships, and especially relationship with GOD change the way we think about those situations that might otherwise be things to fear.

- It doesn't remove us from those situations that might create fear.
- It helps us to face them because we have faith that we do not enter into them alone.
 - In the midst of storms, GOD is there.
 - We face them knowing that we have a meaningful, powerful, life-changing relationship with GOD.
 - You know, GOD,--the DUDE who shows up.