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### Faith Over Fear

What does it mean to you to have faith? To have faith in God? Faith in your fellow neighbor? Faith in yourself? And, what does faith look like? Is it blindly following? Is it just hoping for the best? Or, is it some form of trust? I think a lot about these questions, especially today, as church numbers are decreasing at a somewhat alarming rate (except here of course). And, as we face the onset of another election season, that can seemingly appear to divide us between political parties and ideological standpoints, even those of different socioeconomic classes, racial backgrounds, and gender and sexual orientations. What does it mean to be a person of faith? Not simply religious faith but maybe even more so faith in humanity, in this world, in this life?

Recently, as I have been pondering these questions, I have wondered how being a person of faith relates to fear. Fear which often seems to be everywhere. Because, on the one hand a healthy dose of fear is good, but too much can simply paralyze us. Which we have seen recently with our son Patrick. A child who often appears to be seemingly fearless as he wanders where he likes, especially when he shouldn't, and climbs to heights that are problematic especially for a vertically challenged child. But, when it comes to the water, he is not fearless but very much fearful. Which he made blatantly clear to us as he stated on multiple occasions "peoples do not swim, mommy, peoples drown, and water is dangerous." While I wish he wouldn't say that as I put his bathing suit on for swim lessons I have already paid for, I can't say he's wrong. Peoples can drown. But, they can also swim, and so the fear is healthy because it keeps him from diving headfirst into a body of water he cannot navigate or swim in. And yet, on the other hand that same fear can paralyze and restrain us from truly living, learning and experiencing new things, like for instance learning to swim which would prevent the said drowning, and allow him an enjoyable a day at the pool or the lake or beach, and certainly give me a bit more peace of mind.

In our Gospel reading from Mark today we find another group of peoples who are afraid of drowning as well. As Jesus and his disciples are tormented by a great windstorm on the sea of Galilee. A body of water 680 feet below sea level, surrounded by hills on all sides, making it apt to treacherous swells of waves from violent winds. And this day was no different, as our disciples and their teacher are tossed about in their tiny boat, pummeled by winds and waves on every side. All while, their teacher, Lord, and Messiah, sleeps peacefully at curled up at the helm of their boat, after a long day of preaching.. Exacerbated and terrified the disciples finally approach the sleeping Jesus, as if having to harass him awake, getting in his face, and screaming at him "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Arousing a bleary eyed and foggy minded Jesus, he turns from his sleep to immediately respond and exclaim to the wind and the sea and all who can hear, "Peace, be still!" No sooner stopping the winds, ceasing the waves, and calming the waters. As if nothing had ever happened, as if the storm was almost a figment of the disciples imagination, possibly just a bad dream. Then turning to his disciples, as Jesus, continues to respond to them in turn, stating, "why are afraid, have you still no faith?"

How often do we turn to God in the midst of our own storms and scream out, even harass the Divine, with those same words, "do you not care that we are perishing." It's a fair question to be sure, with all the pain in the world, the turmoil in our country, the trials and tribulations of our own lives. We are not wrong to

be afraid. And, yet, our fears are not always on our side, they are not always the response that will best ensure our safety, or even more so our thriving. Because the truth is fear can paralyze us, or worse it can cause us to turn away, sometimes even against the thing, or the person, or the Divine entity, that may be our salvation after all. Because the truth of the matter is, whether the disciples realized it or not Jesus was in the boat with them the entire time, he was tossed by the same waves, thrown about by the same winds, and pummeled by the same waters they were. The only difference was he remained calm, and when they finally approached him, when they finally called out, when they finally turned to the one who possessed the power to save them, as they exclaimed “do you not care,” he responded, by showing his grace and power and love. By calming the storm which in turn allowed them to stay the course on their journey and continue their mission to share Jesus’ message of salvation and love.

While our son Patrick had no interest or maybe even more so an extreme aversion to getting in the water and participating in swim lessons, the more he came to trust my intentions as his mother, the safety and care of his instructor, and even his own ability to navigate the waters, the more he came to love the thing he had once feared so immensely. I would be remiss to say that fear is bad, it can be helpful, even life saving. But, I believe faith is more powerful, especially in the face of fear. Because the more we can lean into our faith in God, in one another, and in ourselves, I believe, the more we can live life, and live it to the fullest. Just like our disciples who turned to Jesus in the face of their fear, because if they had never even turned to him in the first place they most likely would have perished, and we wouldn’t be here today. But, even their meager faith in Jesus’ ability to care and act and save they brought the winds to halt and the seas to standstill. And more so they stayed their course, and continued their journey braving the storm, crossing the seas, and sharing the good news with any and all who would hear it. How much more could we accomplish, or even simply enjoy, if we put our faith in the Divine, in one another, and even in ourselves, above our fear? How much more could we silence our fears or at the very least calm them if we too yelled out “Peace, be still.” We have work to do, like the disciples and Jesus, we have storms to brave, seas to cross, and good news to share. We are not wrong to exclaim to the Divine, “Do you not care?”, but the real question is will we listen and respond when the response is “Peace, be still?” Because that will be our own miracle and maybe even salvation.