

*Lord, open our ears to hear your Word spoken to us;
Open our hearts to be changed by Your Spirit. Amen.*

Here we are – we’ve made it through a scary and dislocating time,
but Covid is starting to appear in the rear view mirror, most of us are
vaccinated, restrictions are being eased in our state, and though likely we all
know someone who lost someone to this dread disease that has claimed
some 601,000 American lives, it didn’t touch very close to most of us.
Summer is here, our government is stable, for the moment,
Nothing to worry about, right? nothing to stress us out; nothing to fear...
Just like the Sea of Galilee, which is really just a big a lake, easy to cross...
except for the sudden squalls that tend to blow up out of nowhere.

Those guys in the boat that night had some reason to be afraid –
Mark tells us the water was already swamping the boat.
But Jesus wasn’t worried. He was snoozing, and when they did wake him up,
he gently chided them for their lack of faith. Lack of faith????
Don’t you hear that wind? Don’t you feel the water sloshing around your feet?

Didn’t you see where the markets were yesterday?
The latest attacks on voting rights?
How many people out there have guns?
Rising global temperature, rising sea levels, vanishing species?
Oh, we always have real things to worry about.
And we don’t have Jesus around to rebuke the winds and the waves. Or do we?

We live with some promises as the church, this fellowship of Christ-followers –
One promise is that this risen Lord of us is very much with us, through His Spirit.
His Spirit is the same as when he walked on this earth. Only his body has changed.
We are now the Body of Christ, the bearers of his power.
We can speak peace to all kinds of turmoil, outside us and within.

Peace is another of those promises.
The peace of Christ that defies all understanding will guard your hearts and
your minds – that is a promise St. Paul articulates for us.

Paul, as we heard in his letter to the Corinthians this morning, knew a thing or two about danger and deprivation... afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger... All suffered for giving himself over to spreading the word about Jesus in a variety of places and cultures, some more receptive than others. But in a letter to another church he writes that he has learned the trick of being content in all circumstances, in plenty and in want, in danger and in safety. And that trick comes from the decision not to be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving to make your requests known to God. And then, he says, The peace of Christ that passes all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. That's a promise!

Peace is both a command – “peace be with you!” and an invitation. An invitation to let the power of God, the power that made the universe, the power that rose Jesus from the dead – to let that power work on the things we think are too big. Fear has a way of magnifying danger. We need to right-size it. The storm that blew up suddenly on the Sea of Galilee was big and scary, and it scared Jesus' disciples into paralysis. The disciples sitting in that boat were entirely focused on the storm and on what it could do to them – cause waves to capsize the boat and drown them. The power of the storm was real. But they didn't have to give it their whole focus.

When we focus on the source of power and answers instead of on the source of fear, we gain peace, we gain strength – and sometimes God brings the solution through us. When Jesus wakes up and deals with the storm, with a few words, he turns and says, “Hey, what happened to your faith? Why were you afraid?” God was always in charge. That's what living in fear does to us ultimately – it robs us of our freedom.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt famously said in his first inaugural address in 1933, “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.” There was plenty to fear in 1933, with America gripped in the Great Depression, Nazism taking hold in Germany and totalitarianism on the rise worldwide. I feel fear when I read about the efforts to manipulate free and fair elections in our country. Without our democracy we too are at risk of totalitarianism.

Fear is whipped up by those who want to sell more weapons,
hold more wealth for themselves, hold back the rights of others.
Fear is often a natural response to stimuli –
But fear is not where we are called to rest as Christ-followers.

I don't know what storms or anxieties or giants you face this morning,
I know that with God we can face what we fear head on – not going around it,
but through it. And with God we can know that moment when
fear turns to boldness, when desperation leads to courage.
I believe we can see situations that we feel are insurmountable come right down
to size much more often if we master the art of letting God fight for us.

Here's a way to pray: pull up in your mind what it is you're most afraid of.
Visualize it. Then imagine Jesus sitting or standing next to you, looking at with you.
Ask Him to help bring it down to size. It may still be big, but not magnified 100x.
Then ask Jesus to be bigger than that thing you fear. Ask for peace, ask for solutions.
I guarantee something will change in the situation – you or it.

I do know that we are not called to fear, but to freedom in Christ.
I do know that the life of Christ fills us who are united with him in baptism.
And with that life comes power. Not power like an army; not power like a CEO.
The power of the One who made the universe.
The power of love, which is stronger than death.
The power of faith, which is stronger than fear.

Christ's Spirit is the same as when he walked on this earth; only His body has
changed. We are now the Body of Christ, the bearers of his power and peace.
Jesus asks us to be His hands and feet and eyes and voice in the world,
exercising his power over all forces of fear and oppression in the name of Christ.
God is still in the business of stilling storms.
But now he does it through us – if we're willing.

Amen.

Mark 4:35-41

When evening had come, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

As we work together with Christ, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you,

and on a day of salvation I have helped you."

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see-- we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.