

## “Why are you Afraid?”

Matthew 8:19-27

#8 in our series “Jesus Stories.”

May 11, 2014

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### Prayer

Father we pray that you would speak your Word to us. I thank you that your Word is not a dead word; it's a Living Word. So Word of God come and have courage in us. Help us to preach in Jesus' name, Amen.

### Message

When I was a young man, I was discipled by three older men. Three...yet one...in the way of courage. A disciple is one who follows. I have actual video footage of my discipleship training.

A Clip which Peter has titled: “Discipleship Training” is shown.

It includes scenes from *Terminator II*; *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*; *The Spy Who Loved Me*.

Arnold Schwarzeneger grabs a rifle from a biker type. He slowly approaches him; the biker moves back submissively and raises his hands in surrender. Schwarzeneger reaches out, into the biker's shirt pocket, grabs his sunglasses, puts them on, turns, walks away, and hops on a really cool motorcycle as he rides off into the night.

The scene quickly changes to the final standoff in *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* between Blondie (Eastwood), Angel Eyes (Lee Van Cleefe) and Tuco (the wonderful Eli Wallach). On the line is \$200,000 buried in the cemetery they are currently fighting in. Eastwood and his opponents are all staring each other down and we feel the pressure mounting. It's classic Sergio Leone with back and forth closeups and Ennio Morricone's wonderful score in the background, and the quickest shot in the West.

Again the scene spins into action packed adventure as Bond (Roger Moore) flies down a mountain on skis while hotly pursued by the enemy. Classic Bond music plays in the background as James Bond (Roger Moore) approaches a dangerous cliff. He bravely flies off it without hesitation. Then the music stops completely, and we wait with anticipation in the silence as we see him fall down, down, down towards the ground past rugged mountains. Then, just in time, his parachute deploys, the music starts up again, and Bond calmly lands!

After watching Arnold, I'd lift weights like crazy. After watching Clint Eastwood I'd squint at everyone because I wanted those cool crows feet around my eyes (Now I've got them). When I first saw that scene in *The Spy Who Loved Me*, I almost jumped up in the theatre screaming: “Alleluia!” And that's how I learned to ski...following a friend who skied like that.

No one told me that I had to follow those men; I wanted to follow those men. They were glorious. And it wasn't just muscles, crows feet, and ski jumps; it was courage. We called it “cool.” They were “cool.”

Wherever those guys went, it was like a storm on the outside and absolute calm on the inside. In fact, it was as if the calm on the inside even caused the storm on the outside. They had courage!

In the movies it appeared to be due to their faith in their own abilities. But in reality, it was due to the fact that Arnold, Clint, and Roger Moore knew that they were actors in a movie and stars of that movie. And so they knew there had to be a storm or there'd be no story. There had to be a struggle or there'd be no glory, and everything worked to reveal their glory, for that was the story; they were the plot.

They had faith in the author of their story, and so they had great courage, and so I wanted to follow...at least to the movie theatre (Real Cyborgs, gunslingers, and Soviet spies might be a bit too much). But I wanted to follow; I was a disciple, and yet, I was also a disciple of Jesus.

[Image of a meek and mild Jesus]

And Jesus is “meek and mild.” He is “gentle and lowly in heart.”

So Jesus is safe, and these guys were *unsafe*. And I had the impression that Christianity was all about “safety and family values.” Right? So Jesus came to build safe homes and strong family values...right?

If you follow Jesus—The Prince of Peace everything is peaceful right?

Your business thrives.

Your family likes you.

God always provides you with a “place to lay your head.”

Matthew 8:18 (Right after our text from last week. Jesus has healed everybody. It looks like smooth sailing from here on out.)

*When Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go to the other side. And a scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go. And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.”*

Wow! That is some rather aggressive “meek and mild.” The guy says, “Jesus I want to follow, but let me first go bury my father; I need to “focus on the family.” And Jesus says, “*Let the dead bury their own dead.*”

Imagine Jesus interviewed on Christian radio:

Interviewer: So Jesus, tell us about your home and family life.

Jesus: *I have no home...follow me!* (Spoken with a harsh accent) And “*let ze dead bury zere own dead.*” “*Unless you hate your father, your mother, and hate your life, you cannot follow.*”

Now, Jesus loved His mother and told us to love everyone, but if we think following Him is a means to a storm free life, and smooth sailing, we’re a bit deluded!

*And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. (That’s what disciples do; they follow Him.) And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea.*

Matthew 8:23-24

The Greek word translated “storm” is the word *seismos*. It’s where we get the word “seismology.” Everywhere else in Scripture it’s translated “earthquake.” There are words for storm, and Matthew could’ve used them here, but he obviously wants us to make some connection to a *seismos* some place else.

*And behold, there arose a great seismos on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, “Save us Lord; we are perishing.” And he said to them, “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?”*

Matthew 8:24-26

He asks them this question while the *seismos* is still raging, while they still think they are perishing...and He had been asleep. Talk about a storm on the outside and calm on the inside. Even if I'm calm on the outside there's usually a storm on the inside. So even with ear plugs and sleeping pills, I have a hard time falling asleep.

*And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"*

Matthew 8:26-27

*"Why are you afraid?"*

It seems absurd, but I think He really wants us to ask that question: "What are you afraid of?"

Storms? Storms are chaos.  
Are you afraid of storms?

I think Jesus really believed God as writing His story and that He was absolutely essential to the plot. In fact, He was the star of the movie. In fact, more than just important to the plot:

He is the plot, the *Logos*, the meaning.  
He is the Word through whom all is created.  
He is the Rock that the sea must crash upon.

There is no place safer than in the boat with Him.

It's ironic that although it seemed far safer to stay at home with the family, the safest place in all creation, that day, was in that boat, in the midst of the storm with Jesus. And one day, the safest place in all creation may be on a cross, in a storm with Jesus.

Sometimes I watch Christian TV and get so depressed because I think maybe I'm not following Jesus because according to them, it means no storms. But then I read Scripture and realize I should expect storms. Jesus even sails me into storms. He said, *"In this world you will have tribulation,"* and it was us *wealthy, modern Christians* that came up with the idea that we'd get raptured out of here before tribulation.

So Jesus calms the storm but only after He commands us to sail into the storm.

The 17th Century mystic Madame Jeanne Guyon wrote:

You must utterly believe that the circumstances of your life, that is, every minute of your life, as well as the whole course of your life—anything, yes, everything that happens—have all come to you by His will and by His permission. You must utterly believe that everything that has happened to you is from God and is exactly what you need...

You must believe—you must have faith. If you don't believe, it might be calm on the outside but a storm on the inside. I think each of those disciples was terribly afraid on the inside long before the storm exposed their fear on the outside.

Don't be afraid of storms. Or maybe you're afraid of death...that is losing control in storms. And this is really ironic: We're terrified of death when God is constantly arranging our death.

2 Corinthians 4:11

*While we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.*

See? Maybe God arranges all the storms to help us die so that we could live. So we could “lose our lives and find them.”

G.K Chesterton wrote: “Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die.”

Jesus said, “*If you lose your life (psyche in Greek...also translated soul) for my sake you will find it.*”

If you die with Him...you rise with Him.

Maybe storms are supposed to drown us.

Isn't that what baptism is?

We die...so we can live?

You know, every time you fail, are criticized and humiliated but you do not retaliate you die a little. That is, your flesh dies a little. Your mortal flesh is faith in yourself—your *psyche*. Your true self is faith in God—Jesus' *psyche*.

MY *psyche* is a prison that keeps me from living life—real life.

So I ought to thank God for storms that break my faith in me, for to the degree I die to me...I can begin to live.

And we're all dying.

A short time before my father died, my nephew Jared, who was a little boy at the time, called my dad and said, “Poppy, could I come over to your house for ice cream one more time before you die?” And, without skipping a beat, my dad said, “Of course Jared.”

You see? He didn't let fears spoil the ice cream, and Jesus didn't let a storm spoil His nap. I hope you realize that we're all dying, but don't let fear of death spoil the ice cream. Don't let fear of death spoil your nap. Don't let fear of failure keep you from living.

And just because you know you'll fail...don't stop trying to succeed, for actually...

You can't fail unless you try to succeed.

You can't die unless you try to live.

You can't lose yourself if you refuse to surrender yourself and follow Jesus into the storm.

If you're so afraid of storms that you never get in the boat with Jesus, then you never die to yourself...but are a prisoner of yourself trapped by your own fear. It may be calm on the outside, but it will be a storm of anxiety on the inside.

Scripture says that the Devil: “*Keeps us in lifelong bondage through the fear of death.*”

LISTEN CLOSELY: Jesus sails us out of the storm by sailing us into the the storm, but the devil traps the storm in us through fear.

So, why are you afraid?

Maybe you're afraid of storms.

Maybe you're afraid of death by storm.

Maybe you're afraid of the devil.

In Jewish Cosmology, in Jesus' day, the sea was the realm of chaos, demons, and hell. In the next verse, Jesus meets the Gadorene demoniacs and sends their demons into pigs who then run into the sea. The sea was the home of demons.

I think Scripture is implying that the presence of Jesus stirred up a storm in Hell. The presence of the Prince of Peace was violence to the dominion of the devil. The humility of Jesus “meek and mild” burned the arrogance that is Hell. So wherever you sail with Jesus in this world...you can expect a storm...a violent reaction.

Jesus didn't promise peace and prosperity in this age.

He promised tribulation, persecution, and a cross.

He predicted a storm in the world but peace in your heart.

Like Paul writes: “*We battle...*” The problem with Schwarzenegger, Eastwood, and James Bond is not their courage...but that they're engaged in the wrong war with powerless weapons. We're engaged in a battle with the devil and the weapons of our warfare are not “carnal.” We overcome with the “*blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony.*” That is...we overcome with the blood of Jesus, the blood of Jesus “meek and mild.”

He said, “*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am meek and mild—gentle and lowly in heart.*” Well, the only yoke I see on Jesus is a cross. And it's with Jesus on His cross that we die to ourselves and live with God: “*I have been crucified with Christ,*” writes Paul. “*It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.*”

Well, the devil wants the disciples off the sea and back to burying the dead: safe in their homes, locked down in fear. But Jesus has ordered them to sail into this storm. Martin Luther said, “Even the devil is God's devil. Julien of Norwich explains: “This is why He's so furious—all his rage is only used by God for God's purposes.”

Remember when Paul tells the Corinthians to deliver the guy up to Satan? He says, it's for “*the destruction of his flesh...that he might be saved on the day of the Lord.*” And have you ever wondered about this? Didn't God the Father have God the Son somehow “delivered up” to the devil or by the devil on the cross for the “destruction of our flesh...” that we might be saved on the day of the Lord? I know that's some heavy stuff but it was the devil that was behind that storm, and yet, God predestined that storm. And Jesus smiled right into that storm for a reason.

Well, it's clear: God has the devil on a leash. So, maybe you're afraid of God?

The first time I saw a demon cast out of a man (and knew it was real and not acting) I remember being terrified but not of the devil; I was terrified of God. I realized all my so called “control was only an illusion. In two chapters...in Matthew 10:28 Jesus tells them that there's only one to fear and that's God.

In Romans 1, Paul tells us that “*the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness*” and all ungodliness is faithlessness. In Romans 2, Paul describes the wrath of God as God “*giving us up*” to our own evil. As if He removes His hand and the storm rages.

It's amazing how all of this can be true at once. But Satan hates the presence of God in the boat and God hates the presence of ungodliness in us. Either way, God and ungodliness collide, and so the storm rages. The storm rages; humanity is trapped in death, the devil reigns and God's wrath burns, all because we are unfaithful.

Jesus looks at his disciples in the storm on the sea and says, “*Why are you afraid oligopistioi—Why are you afraid, o you of little faith?*” Isn't that exactly what they're truly afraid of? I mean, they wouldn't see it or admit it, back in Capernaum, safe in their own homes, the dead burying their own dead. They wouldn't admit it back in Capernaum but that is exactly what they're afraid of. That's what I'm afraid of: Their own little faith. We say, “You're saved by faith,” and clearly Jesus has faith; He sleeps in storms.

I don't sleep well in storms. He tells the storm to stop, and it stops. I've tried that, and it usually doesn't stop. Jesus has faith, but I'm afraid I don't have faith.

Why am I afraid Jesus? Honestly? I'm afraid that I don't have faith, and I can't fear my way to faith because my fear is a lack of faith. And Jesus is like walking, talking faith, and He reveals that I don't have faith and we're: "*saved by faith.*"

In Mark's version of this story, after Jesus calms the storm, Mark records that they were all filled with great fear and said, "Who is this man?" They were afraid of Jesus and His faith. Well, Jesus sails us into storms to reveal our lack of faith, but how do we get faith? Because you can't just fear your way to faith; faith is trust in God.

Jesus has so much faith in His Father that He sleeps like a baby in a raging storm. However, we do know of one night He didn't sleep. And according to prophets like Isaiah and theologians like the apostle Paul, He was sailing into a storm, the storm of God's unmitigated wrath. He would be delivered up to the curse—the death—the devil and our unfaithfulness.

The wrath of God would fall on Him. At the Passover dinner that night, He had given us His life, and it's as if He took our "life." For in the garden, He couldn't sleep, and His will even seemed opposed to God's will, for He said, "*If there is any way, let this cup pass from me, never the less not my will but thy will be done.*" I think He was already praying to God from our prison of faithlessness and fear.

Well, He calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee. But how do you calm the storm of God's wrath over the sin of Adam, over the sin of mankind? In Matthew 12, Jesus says, "*As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*"

And now that I mention it, doesn't this story remind you a bit of Jonah? Jonah was a prophet that God commanded to preach to Ninevah. But Jonah didn't trust God. He didn't trust God to damn the Ninevites. He did not want God to save his enemies, so he fled from the presence of God on a ship bound for the open sea.

There's a great storm on that sea, but like Jesus, Jonah is asleep. They wake him and beg him to pray that his God might calm the storm. But how is Jonah to calm this storm? Jonah tells them that he's the cause of the storm and convinces them to throw him overboard. When they do, the storm stops, and Jonah is swallowed by a great fish prowling the deep. The Ninevites worshiped "Nina" the great fish goddess.

Well, Jonah was in the belly of that beast for three days and three nights (Jonah 2:1) Jonah writes: "*Out of the belly of Sheol I cried,*" in the King James, it's "*out of the belly of Hell, I cried.*" Even more literally: "*out of the womb of Hell I cried.*"

Jonah descended into Hell, that is *Sheol-Hades*. Solomon writes: *There is no work, thought, knowledge or wisdom in Sheol.*" The Psalmist writes, "*In Sheol, who will give you praise?*" There's no faith...only fear in Sheol. Jonah 2:6-7 "*I went down to the land whose bars closed on me forever. Yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord and my prayer came to you.*"

Well, how did Jonah get faith in the depths of the sea, in the belly of the beast? He ends His prayer with this line: "*What I have vowed I will pay; salvation belongs to the Lord.*" Jonah 2:4 What is the payment Jonah must pay? He must confess: "salvation belongs to the Lord." He can't save himself; He's not the savior, and he can't tell God whom He can and cannot save. Salvation is not his to hold.

If God wants to save Ninevah, God can save Ninevah. He confesses: "Salvation belongs to the Lord;" He entrusts salvation to God. "Salvation" in the Hebrew is pronounced *Yeshua*. *Yeshua* is also a name that means "God is Salvation." In English we say, "Jesus." Jonah confesses: "*Yeshua*

*tah la Yahweh.*” In a word, Jonah confesses Jesus, and the beast can’t stomach the Word. The beast vomits Jonah onto dry land, Jonah preaches, and Ninevah is saved. He calms the sea.

But how did Jonah get faith? How did Jonah get Jesus in the womb of *Sheol*, that we call Hell. Jesus said, *As Jonah was three days and three nights in the womb of the “katos,” the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

At the cross, Jesus lifted His voice and cried: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (It’s the first line of Psalm 22) And then: *“It is finished,”* and delivered up His Spirit. At that moment Matthew records that there was a great *seismos*, as if we all threw Jesus overboard and into the sea.

There was a great *seismos* as if the Rock of ages was dropped into the heart of the sea, as if the Faithful One descended into the land of faithlessness, as if Hell swallowed Heaven and couldn’t stomach the meal. And there was a great *seismos*. *“the rocks were split and the tombs were opened.”* (Matthew 27:52) And some people came out (or were vomited out). Maybe one was Jonah.

We don’t understand time and eternity very well, but maybe one was Jonah in 750 B.C. We don’t understand how time and eternity work, but we do understand that Faith...in Jonah...must have been the Spirit of Jonah in Jesus.

Matthew records a *seismos* on Good Friday as Jesus died, and a great *seismos* on Easter morning as Jesus was raised and said to the women, *“Greeting and no more fear.”*

Faith in us is the Spirit of Jesus in us and that’s how He calms the storm in us and in all creation.

We’re saved by Faith, the faith of Jesus.

Faith isn’t a work you do.

Faith is a work God does in you.

Jesus is the *Eschatos Adam* – Ultimate Adam. Jesus is the ultimate action hero. You know I was disciplined by Arnold Schwarzenegger, Clint Eastwood, and James Bond. Because of them, I lifted weights, got crows feet, and went off of ski jumps way too big. But it wasn’t like a set of laws I had to obey, a workbook I had to read, or a program I had to perform. No. God just provided the storms in my life and then I’d go to the movies and watch these guys beat the devil, defy death, and calm storms. I forgot me...and worshiped them. And I was shaped a little in their image.

I was disciplined a little by Arnold, Clint, and James, but I hope to be disciplined a lot by Jesus. So God provides the storms, and I come to church and hear His story. I read His story in Scripture, and even more, He’s in my boat, in the midst of the storm.

If I think I have to make myself in His image, if I think I have to make myself faithful...I hate God and want to stay home imprisoned in fear. But if, in the storm, I see that He is faithful, I forget me and worship Him. I lose my *psyche*, and I begin to gain His *Psyche*—His Faith. I’m “psyched out” and He’s “psyched in.” I lose my life and find it filled with Him.

So...why are you afraid?

Is it because you don’t have faith?

Well, He has sailed you into your storm so you’d see that you don’t have faith and He does have faith, and you are saved by His Faith because He makes you faithful.

In two chapters, Matthew 10:28, Jesus says something that at first is utterly terrifying and then profoundly liberating. He says, *“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul (psyche—life). Rather fear him who can destroy both soul (psyche-life) and body in hell (that’s Gehenna).*

That's the place that *Sheol* is consumed by God's wrath,  
the place that sin is consumed by eternal fire,  
the place that our old psyche is consumed by God's *Psyche*.

A Christian is someone that surrenders his *psyche* to God in Christ Jesus, before his flesh is consumed in the flames of *Gehenna*.

Well, Jesus says, "*Fear Him who can destroy both psyche and body in Gehenna. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*"

Did you catch that: "**FEAR GOD!**" and: "*Therefore, fear not!*"

It's like God says, "*Do not fear anything or anyone but Me. Look at Me; fear Me; lock your eyes on Me and fear only Me. Do you see Me? Do you see I care for you and know every hair on your head? Do you see that I'm in your boat? Do you see I descend into Hell for the love of you? Do you see Jesus? Then you see Me. Fear only Me! Not storms, death, the devil, even your own lack of faith. Fear only Me! Now...don't fear!!*" THAT'S FAITH!

Hebrews 12:2 "*He is the author and finisher of our faith.*"

So why are you afraid?

You are afraid because you've believed a lie that you are your own salvation. But this is the Word of God: "*Yahweh* is Salvation." That means Jesus.

So what must you do?

Nothing. You just heard the Word of your Father in the midst of your storm.

When my son Coleman was four. I got a big yellow tent for Father's Day. The kids wanted to try it out, so I set it up in the backyard. We talked for awhile and then tried to go to sleep. Coleman was so excited but the wind rustled through the leaves, banged the gate, and moved the flaps...like a little bitty storm.

Coleman jumped up and said, "Dad I'm freaked out," and I said, "OK...go inside." He did. And then...he changed his mind. He came back out and said, "Daddy, I want to be with you. I said, "OK," and then the wind rustled the leaves and banged the gate and moved the flaps. He jumped up and said, "I'm freaked out," and I said, "OK...go inside with Mom." This went on for a long time: in out, in out, in out.

You know faith starts as a seed and it grows; it's a process. Jesus said, "*If you have faith (present tense), as a mustard seed, you will say (future tense) to this mountain move and it will move. You see? If you have a little bit of faith it will grow.*"

Well, when Coleman was inside, He was miserable...and outside, He was terrified. But outside, in the storm, he'd snuggle so close to me. His eyes would be wide open staring at mine, getting courage from mine. I realized I'm the cause of his fear, and I'm the source of his faith. The fear will pass but faith is eternal. He said, "Dad I'm freaked out," and I said something like this: "Coleman listen to me; I'm the Lord of the backyard. And I'm telling you do not fear the wind; do not fear the back gate nor the flaps on the tent. There is only one whom you should fear and that's me! Now give me a kiss and go to sleep!"

Jesus said, "There's only one to fear, and if you've seen me, you've seen him."

### **Communion**

And then He took the bread and He broke it saying, "*This is my body given to you; take and eat; do it in remembrance of me.*" And in the same way after supper, and having given thanks, He took the



cup and said, *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins; drink of it all of you, and do this in remembrance of me.”*

You see, this is the kiss of the Father in the midst of your storm. So He calls you to come to the table. Ingest His Word; ingest the Prince of Peace, and worship Him. In Jesus’ name, Amen

### **Benediction**

So why are you afraid?

You’re a “little faith”—*Oligopistoi*.

That sounds like bad news, but it’s actually really good news because it means you have a little faith with which you recognize that you need more faith. Now here’s the really *really* good news. That little faith is a seed, and the seed is eternal, and the seed will grow. Jesus said it will grow into a Kingdom. One day you will walk on the water; one day you’ll say to a mountain move and you’ll see it move. You will realize that thing in you is more real than the entire creation, for it’s the very Spirit of Jesus.

You know, it was probably Peter and his brother Andrew’s boat that they were in...or James and John’s. Jesus got in the boat and took them out for that little adventure that day. Later on in the story, Peter walks on the water. And do you remember? He walks on the water by looking at Jesus, not by looking at the wind and the waves? At the end of his life he’s crucified with Jesus and the world has never been the same.

Coleman finally went inside and spent the night with mom; he failed. But we went camping again, and again, and again, and now Coleman is my child, of the four, that I’m most scared about because it seems like he has no fear whatsoever.

What I’m saying is: That little faith will grow, so keep looking at Jesus. Have courage. Receive the kiss of your Father in the midst of the storm and you’ll be walking on the sea. In Jesus’ name believe the gospel, Amen.

*Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don’t be shy about informing us of errors.*