

***“Even the Wind and the Sea Obey Him”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, August 10, 2014

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*Worship Theme for August: The Peace of Christ*

**Holy Scriptures: Mark 4:35-41; Romans 8:31-35, 37-39**

Mark 4:35-41 (NRSV)

*Jesus Stills a Storm*

**35** On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” **36** And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. **37** A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. **38** 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?” **39** 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. **40** He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” **41** 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?”

## Romans 8:31-35, 37-39 (NRSV)

### *God's Love in Christ Jesus*

**31** What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? **32** He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? **33** Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. **34** Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. **35** Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

**37** No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38** For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## **When Faith and Fear Collide**

A pastor was talking with a hard-working parishioner

who was a devoted follower of Jesus Christ.

She was active in community service projects and present at most worship services.

Her minister expressed thanks for her commitment to God.

She said, *"Yes, it is such a blessing after a hard week of*

*work*

*to come to church, sit down on the soft cushions,  
and not think about anything.”*

Well, go ahead and get comfortable if you like.

Please be advised that we're going to think about something today.

Jesus addresses the storms in our lives,

so let's talk about the blessed reality that these are the times

when we are most likely to witness the collision of faith and fear.

## **When Faith and Fear Collide**

Storms and high winds and waves toss the boats of our lives,  
and they arrive with little or no announcement.

You've probably seen the ad on TV where a gentleman gets a note card

that informs him his heart attack has been scheduled for the next day at three.

As much as we might wish they did,

crises don't send advance warnings

via note cards or flares, smoke signal or

Instagram.

Like Southern grits and God's grace, crises just comes.

## **When Faith and Fear Collide**

In the Gospel we overhear the story of a journey Jesus took with his friends.

The disciples travel with Jesus across the sea.

The Son of God settles in for a well-deserved nap,

    nestled in with the cushions in the bottom of the boat.

Soon a strong wind arises and the seas rage and roar,

    tossing the boat to and fro.

**37** *...and the waves beat into the boat,*

*so that the boat was already being swamped.*

Clearly they were fearful.

We can understand; we can relate.

Who here hasn't had an unexpected and frightening storm arise in our own story?

Like us, they feared for their lives.

Huddled together, cold and wet and seasick,

    they found themselves in unfamiliar and frightening territory.

The disciples' first response is fear.

What happens when we are afraid,

afraid for our lives,

afraid for our lifestyles,

afraid for our way of life,

afraid for our livelihood?

We've seen up close and personal what happens when fear is not handled well.

Fear can paralyze.

Fear can undermine.

Fear can zap confidence, feed anger, and overcome compassion.

When we are afraid the first thing to go

is care and compassion for one another in our midst.

Fear tells us there is only room enough for us in the boat,

and hospitality is quickly tossed overboard.

Fear tells the outsider, the alien, the stranger that there is no room in the inn.

Fear whispers into our subconscious that the solution to interpersonal conflict

is force first, that might makes right,

and healing broken relationships becomes a

distant dream.

When fear dominates,

we are sorely tempted to put ourselves first, front and center.

When fear dominates,

so often we fight, take flight, or freeze with fright.

When fear dominates,

what happens...

## **When Faith and Fear Collide**

The Word of God speaks to our situation.

Filled with fear, afraid and frozen, the disciples call out for help.

**38** *But Jesus 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?”*

We can imagine them saying,

*“Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy!”*

God did, and God does.

**39** *Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind,*

*and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!"*

*Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.*

**40** *He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"*

**41** *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?"*

## **When Faith and Fear Collide**

Clearly the Gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us that

God's will is for only one to be the victor.

Why are we afraid?

Have we still no faith?

Throughout the Holy Bible

the Psalmists' songs, prophets' warnings, and priests' pastoral care

can be summed up in these five words: *Be not afraid! Have faith!*

Let go of whatever you once thought would save you.

In a "Pirates of the Caribbean" movie they said, *"Release the Kracken!"*

and a sea monster attacked the ship.

Release what you once thought would save you or protect you or serve as body armor.

Release your fear,

your rage,

your anxiety,

your vainglory.

Choose instead to move with Jesus toward the love of God,

who can and will save you, redeem you, and restore you to wholeness.

When the winds and the sea rock your boat

trust that Jesus will awaken and address them.

Become ever more aware of God's presence in the midst of life's storms.

Let go of whatever you once thought would save you.

Listen for the voice of God who says, "Peace! Be still."

Even the wind and the sea will obey him.

Sure as day follows night, the peace of Christ shall overcome

the storms that transpire, the devil who arrives, the monsters that arise.

**When fear and faith collide,**

God is with you,

rooting for your faith to kick in and kick fear



out.

The faith of God planted deep within us empowers us to manage fear.

One helpful way to approach Christian faith  
is as fear management.

We are not here to be alone, to cope as lonely islands, to be self-sufficient.

A good friend's mother told him his first words were, "Do it myself."

They say it takes a village to raise a child.

We say it takes a church to help us manage fear and live into our faith.

Ministry is about relationships,

relationships with empower us to respond to the storms in our lives.

Foster and build healthy relationships with your church and community

so that you need not face life's storms alone, or afraid, or fearfully.

We may expect our faith to protect us, to save us, to heal and help us,

to give us peace and peace of mind,

not send us into danger, into the unknown, into

the eye of the storm.

Actually faith is a key ingredient for managing and overcoming our fear.

Jesus Christ is with us in the storms, and the Son of God shows us that way out.

## **When Faith and Fear Collide**

One Saturday day morning when I was in high school and living in NYC

my dad and I went on a bike tour

of various parks and points of interest in our fair city.

George and I joined a group of 20 or so citizens to learn the history of city parks,

and to enjoy a bright spring Saturday.

[*Hey, Saturday in the park with George...*]

Anyway, towards dusk we arrived at the final site,

an urban landscaped park in central Harlem with a unique tower.

After a brief speech by the tour guide,

we rolled down Lexington Avenue towards the day's starting point.

Folks from the neighborhood were hanging out,

enjoying the sunset, watching this sight, 20 sweaty

folks on bikes,

all waiting for a light to turn green,

when suddenly a bottle sailed through the air and  
landed – Crash! –

on the street by our tires.

Immediately the tour took on a whole new dimension.

Some of the folks on stoops who had been idly watching

began to move toward the bikers.

And then my dad did the unexpected.

George got off his bike, and started to walk toward the  
sidewalk.

As he walked slowly forward he held one hand up in air,  
saying, “Peace, peace, peace...”

And with his other hand he waved for the group to move it,

telling us out of the side of his mouth, “Go!”

I high tailed it out of there;

nothing in the world moves faster than a scared kid.

I went straight home and waited, anxiously, on the front  
stoop for my dad.

Was he okay?

Last I had seen he was walking into the unknown, speaking  
words of peace.

Those were some long, slow minutes.

Finally he arrived home, safe and sound.

What he had done was to follow the bike tour group  
and help them process what happened.

They were ready to go home and tell wild stories of a riot up  
in Harlem.

He asked them, *“What did you really see?”*

*Were you harmed? Did anyone get hurt? No.*

*Are you and everyone else okay? Yes.*

*So there is no need to exaggerate*

*or attempt to make good people  
out to be evil. All is well.”*

In a way, George ventured into two unknowns that evening.

First, he sacrificially offered his body, giving voice to the  
peace of Christ,

and calmed a potentially difficult situation.

Furthermore, he faithfully followed through to offer his  
wisdom

in order to preserve the dignity of a community  
lest it be slandered...again.

### **When Faith and Fear Collided, Love was the Victor.**

The Love of Christ says to the world, “Peace! Be still”

The winds and the sea obey him.

Fear is overcome, and compassion is restored.

What I name and claim and sustain from that experience

in my formative high school years

is the insight that Jesus' faith both protected  
George and prepared him,

and then God sent George into the  
unknown,

into danger and harm's way.

George and countless other people of grace and mercy, folks  
like you and you and you,

have done the same, and if they can do so, can be so,  
can live – and die –

and be raised into life everlasting,

then we can, too.

Sometimes the Spirit sends us into places of hurt and  
brokenness

to be a presence, to be a conduit of grace.

When faith and fear collide,

when love rules the day

and the peace of Christ reigns,

it's not about you;

the victory is about the One you  
represent,

the One you re-present.

When storms arise, when the devil arrives, when fear and faith collide,

Jesus Christ makes Himself present to speak peace,

to calm the rage and raging,

to show us the way home, the way out,  
the way forward.

A woman was out for a stroll one pleasant evening

when suddenly she fell into a deep hole.

She landed okay but could not get out.

A lawyer walking by heard her cries for help and flipped her his card,

telling her to call him if she ever got out.

A minister walking by heard her cries for help,

and promised her he would inform the Outreach Committee.

A friend walking by heard her cries for help and jumped into the hole.

*“Jesus Christ, why did you do that?”* she asked.

*“Lord, I don’t need company; I need to get out.”*

Her friend replied, *“I know the way out. I’ll show you. Let’s go together.”*

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

### Communion Invitation

In her book, Amazing Grace, Kathleen Norris said,

*“When I first began to attend church services as an adult,*

*I found it ironic that it was the language about Jesus Christ,*

*meant to be the most inviting,*

*that made me feel the most left out.*

*I often felt a void at the heart of things.*

*My Christianity seemed to be missing its center.*

*When I confessed this to a monk,*

*he reassured me, saying,*

*‘Oh, most of us feel that way at one time or another.*

*Jesus is the hardest part of the religion to grasp, to keep alive.’*

*I told him that I probably felt Jesus’ hand in things most*

*during worship,*

*whether I was in church or at home, or at the monastery.*

*Just a look around at the motley crew assembled in his name,*

*myself among them, lets me know how unlikely it all is.*

*The whole lot of us, warts and all,*

*just seems so improbable, so absurd,*

*I figure that ONLY Christ would be so foolish,*

*or so powerful, as to have brought us all together.”*

God brings us together to break bread,

to share the cup of life, to be the body of Christ.

All who believe, all who doubt, wonder, or seek to know or know more

more about the Living Christ are welcome here.

The gifts of God for the people of God may appear foolish;

the Good News is that they have the power to save.