

## Wesley United Methodist Church

June 24, 2018

“Why Are You So Afraid?”

Mark 4:35-41

Karen Fair tells a story about her three-year-old daughter, Abby, who was having trouble sleeping through the night. She kept waking up because she was afraid. Each time Karen tucked her into bed again, she would remind her that Jesus was with her and that He would keep her safe.

The sleepless nights continued, with Abby seeking comfort in her parents' bedroom. Finally, one night Karen asked her daughter if she had prayed for Jesus to take her fear away and help her fall asleep. “Oh yes,” Abby assured her, “He told me to come and get you!”

In our lesson for today Jesus has been teaching by the lake. Read Mark 4:35-41

That always fascinated me. The disciples, including the sturdy fishermen that Jesus had called, were afraid of the storm, but when Jesus calmed the storm, they really were terrified. They were terrified of his power over the wind and the waves. To me that adds so much more credibility to the Gospel story. It shows the disciples in all their humanness. They didn't know how to take Jesus. “Who is this?” they asked. “Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

Before we deal with the question the disciples asked, we need to deal with the question Jesus asked them, “Why are you so afraid?” That is a question I could ask many of you. It is a question I could also ask myself: Why are you so afraid?

Fear is at the heart of most of the problems that human beings have. The opposite of faith is not doubt. The opposite of faith is fear. Think about it for a moment and try to tell me any problem in the human heart that is not based on fear. At the heart of negative emotion is fear, fear of people who are not the same as we are, fear about our own adequacy and self-worth, fear about our own ability to cope with life, fear concerning the future and the areas of life over which we have no control. At the heart of worry, resentment, hatred, guilt and almost every negative emotion is fear that eats at our well-being and our peace of mind. And so often our fears are out of proportion to reality.

It's true of most of us, even if we're not aware of it. We have a tendency to turn molehills into mountains primarily because deep down we are afraid. Most of the problems we have are caused by fear. It may be the fear that someone is taking advantage of us, it may be fear of failure, it may be fear of looking foolish, fear that we won't fit in, fear that we will be abandoned. Few people aren't driven by some fear or another. Jesus says to us, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” That is to say, the way to conquer fear is through faith. Faith is the only true antidote I know of for fear. But not just faith in anybody or anything. The only kind of faith that really matters is faith in Jesus Christ.

“Who is this?” asked the disciples about Jesus. “Even the wind and the waves obey him!” Suddenly they realized there was something about Jesus that was different. He could calm storms. “*Be still and know that I am God.*” Psalm 46:10.

Remember the series of books called *Chicken Soup for the Soul*? In one of the books there is a touching story about a young man, a veteran, ready to marry and settle down. But this young man had a problem a problem directly caused by fear. He was a responsible young man but he couldn't keep a job and he was discouraged. Why was he in such a state? Because he stuttered quite badly.

He heard that a candy company in Plant City, Florida, was looking for a route driver. And he'd heard that the owner of the company, a man named Miller, was a former stutterer who had somehow learned to control his stutter. A fellow sufferer, this young man decided, would certainly understand and hire him. He set his heart on getting that job. In his interview Mr. Miller asked him why he wanted the job. The young man said, “B-b-because I need the m-m-money.” For a long time Mr. Miller didn't say anything. Then finally he looked him straight in the eye. “Young man,” he said softly, “I'm not going to give you a job.” The young man stared at him, dumbfounded.

“Oh, don't get me wrong,” Mr. Miller said. “I think you'd do well. It's just that I don't have any opening right now.” Then he reached into his desk drawer and pulled out a piece of paper, worn and tattered. “I'd like you to take this home and read it,” he said. “Read it every night for a month.”

Hardly hearing Mr. Miller's words, the young man reached out numbly, took the paper and stuck it in his pocket. Tears of disappointment burned in his eyes. He turned his head away, told Mr. Miller good bye and slumped out of the Miller Candy Company.

That night he felt totally dejected. Who wants a stutterer around? He asked himself in defeat. Nobody. And as long as he stuttered he would be a nobody. He had lived with this pain all his life. After the interview with Mr. Miller, he was prepared never to speak another sound. He took the piece of paper Miller had given him out of his pocket, ready to tear it to shreds. But something made him look at it. It was a prayer a very well known prayer, but one he didn't know at the time. It read like this: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things

I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” He read the words again. Then again. They were like the light at the end of the tunnel.

He pondered the first phrase: “Accept the things I cannot change.” He could work at easing his stuttering, he knew, but he probably could never really change the way he talked. He would need to accept that.

Then he read the second phrase: “Courage to change the things I can.” What he could change were his fears of stepping out of his shell, fear of trying to be somebody, fear of thinking bigger than he had been doing.

Then came the third phrase: “And the wisdom to know the difference.” “God grant me the serenity...” Here he knew, was the key to the whole prayer. When, he wondered, was the last time he had actually reached out to God? Years earlier, when he was a kid, the young man had prayed that he would wake up one morning and talk differently. When it didn’t happen, he forgot about God. But suddenly now he had the feeling that God hadn’t forgotten about him. Soon he was asleep, a deep and restful sleep. But though serenity came that night, it didn’t hang around all the time. And change didn’t come overnight either. He kept reciting that prayer, reminding himself of its words and their meaning, til he finally could place himself in God’s hands, in trust, without fear of what might happen to him.

One thing he had learned as a young boy in church was that when he sang he did not stutter. It seems that when a stutterer speaks, air gets trapped in his throat. But when he sings, for some reason the breathing apparatus works normally and there is no stutter.

This young man loved to sing the songs he learned at church, and he discovered he had a gift for writing songs. And so one day he decided to exercise the courage that he had been praying about the courage to change the things he could.

Armed with some of his songs, he went to Nashville in hopes of getting somebody to listen to his work. One door led to another, and one day he got an appointment to audition for Minnie Pearl, one of the biggest names in country music. He was scared. As he went to the studio, he kept praying: “Your serenity, Lord. Your serenity.”

The audition went well and Minnie Pearl hired him as a back-up musician and a songwriter. He was grateful for his break, but he longed to be a solo performer.

Then in 1970, singer Glen Campbell invited him to accompany him on his new television show. As they rehearsed for the show, they would swap jokes. Campbell discovered that this young man had a terrific sense of humor and his stutter only added to the humorous impact that he had. Campbell wanted him to start talking and singing on his show. The young man was terrified. He called his wife and told her he wanted to back out. She assured him that they were all behind him. “Don’t be afraid,” she said. “Afraid,” he thought to himself. That’s what he was. When he hung up the phone, his mind went back to that scrap of paper. Its words by now were as clear in his memory as they must have been on that paper when Mr. Miller first wrote them. “God, grant me the serenity...”

Some of you know that this is the true life story of country music superstar Mel Tillis. He would tell you that without his faith in God he would have been defeated long ago, defeated not by forces on the outside, defeated not even by his stuttering, but defeated by his fear. “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” Mel Tillis died last year November 19<sup>th</sup>. He was 85.

“Why are you so afraid?” Jesus asked his disciples. He asks that same question of us. Are you letting your fear keep you from being all God created you to be? Fear is the biggest problem in our lives. The best way to conquer fear is with faith. Not just faith in anybody or anything, faith in God, faith in Jesus Christ.

“Who is this?” asked the disciples about Jesus. “Even the wind and the waves obey him!” Yes, they do. Nothing can stop the person whose faith is in the Lord.