

“Faith comes and grows by seeing, hearing, and experiencing what Christ Jesus does; by listening to the story of his life after his birth. Christ Jesus is God with us and all he does is what God does.”

One of those stories piggy backs with what we discussed last week- “When Fear Shakes, May Faith Shine”- and it can be found just a few chapters away in Matthew 14. Again, the disciples find themselves in a boat at sea. It was a common way of travel for them. This time, Jesus wasn’t asleep in the bow of the boat. We will notice the continued presence of fear within the disciples based on what is happening all around them, however this story reveals a transitional element of faith and its power to help Peter, and us, shine bright in the darkness.

### **Read Matthew 14:22-33**

For many people, life is- well, life is a jungle. Not a jungle of trees and beasts. Would that, it were so simple. Would that, our jungles could be cut with a machete, or our adversaries trapped in a cage. But our jungles are comprised of the thicker thickets of failing health, broken hearts, and empty wallets. Our forests are framed with hospital walls and divorce courts. We don’t hear the screeching of birds or the roaring of lions, but we do hear the complaints of neighbors and the demands of bosses. Our predators are our creditors, and the brush that surrounds us is the rush that exhausts us. It’s a jungle out there. And for some, even for many, hope (faith) is in short supply.

If hope and faith are in short supply, how can we restore our hope and faith? Look to God. Focus on Christ. Whether we are a lamb lost on a craggy ledge or a city slicker alone in the concrete jungle, everything changes when God, our rescuer and restorer, appears. With God, our loneliness diminishes because we have fellowship. With God, our despair decreases, because we have vision. With God, our confusion begins to lift, because we have direction.

We must note though that we haven’t left the jungle. The trees still eclipse the sky, and the storms still cut the skin. Animals lurk and rodents scurry. The jungle is still a jungle. The jungle doesn’t change because we have hope and faith. What has changed is our hope and faith that the One who can lead us through and deliver us out is with us. Faith is not the absence of fear, but the power to stand in the face of fear knowing our fears don’t define us or control us.

Perhaps the greatest archenemy of faith is fear. When fear shakes, and it will, I pray our faith will shine. Because when faith shines, we experience a God, a Lord, a Savior, a life filled with meaning and purpose and belonging and opportunity greater than any other.

In Psalm 23, David declared, "I will fear no evil." How could he? Because he knew where to look. Peter walked on water. How dare he? Because he knew where to look.

There is a fellow who has a fear of crowds. When encircled by large groups, his breath grows short, panic surfaces, and he begins to sweat. He received some help, curiously, from a golfing buddy. The two were at a movie theatre, waiting their turn to enter, when fear struck again. The crowd closed in like a forest. He wanted out and out fast. His buddy told him to take a few deep breaths. Then he helped manage the crisis by reminding him of the golf course. "When you are hitting your ball out of the rough, and you are surrounded by trees, what do you do?" "I look for an opening?" "You don't stare at the trees?" "Of course not. I find an opening and focus on hitting the ball through it." "Do the same with the crowd. When you feel the panic, don't focus on the people; focus on the opening."

Good counsel in golf. Good counsel in life. Rather than focus on the fear, focus on the solution. Don't measure the size of the mountains; talk to the One who can move it. Instead of carrying the world on your shoulders, talk to the One who holds the universe in the palm of a hand.

"Faith is trusting what the eye can't see. Eyes see the prowling lion. Faith sees Daniel's angel. Eyes see storms. Faith sees Noah's rainbow. Eyes see giants. Faith sees Canaan. Our eyes see our faults. Our faith sees our Savior. Our eyes see our guilt. Our faith sees Christ's blood. Our eyes see our grave. Our faith sees a city whose builder and Maker is God. Our eyes look in the mirror and see a sinner, a failure, a promise-breaker. By faith, we look in the mirror and see a robed prodigal bearing the ring of grace on our finger and the kiss of our Father on our face."

(Adapted from Lucado, *When God Whispers Your Name*)

When fear shakes, FAITH helps us focus on God.

There are a few names for God that describe God's character. When we are confused about the future, we can go to *Jehovah-rah*, our caring shepherd. When we are anxious about provisions, we can go to *Jehovah-jireh*, the Lord who provides. When our challenges are too great, we can go to *Jehovah-shalom*, the Lord is peace. When our bodies are sick and emotions are weak, we can go to *Jehovah-rophe*, the Lord who heals. When you feel like a soldier behind enemy lines, we can take refuge in *Jehovah-nissi*, the Lord my banner. God is the shepherd who

guides, the Lord who provides, the voice who brings peace in the storm, the physician who heals the sick, and the banner that guides the soldier.

God is the alpha and the omega, the beginning, and the end. And since no act brought God forth, no act can take God out. Does God fear an earthquake? Does God tremble at a tornado? Hardly. God sleeps through storms and calms the wind with a word. Cancer does not trouble God and cemeteries do not disturb God. God was there before they came, and God will be here long after they are gone. Counselors can comfort us in the storm, but we need a God who can still the storm. Friends can hold our hand at our deathbed, but we need a God who has defeated the grave. Philosophers can debate the meaning of life, but we need a Lord who can declare the meaning of life. You need God. I need God. We need God.

We don't need what Dorothy found in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*? She and her trio followed the yellow brick road only to discover that the wizard was a wimp! Nothing but smoke and mirrors and tin-drum thunder. Is that the kind of god we need? We don't need to carry the burden of a lesser god... a god on a shelf, a god in a box, or a god in a bottle. We need a God who can place 100 billion stars in our galaxy and 100 billion galaxies in the universe. We need a God who, while so mind-numbingly mighty, can come in the soft of night and touch us with the tenderness of snow.

When faith shines, we can focus on the facts that "God is a great God. God's character is holy. God's truth is absolute. God's strength is unending. God's discipline is fair. God's provisions are abundant for our needs. God's light is adequate for our path. God's grace is sufficient for our sins. God is never early, never late. God's plan is perfect. Bewildering. Puzzling. Troubling. But perfect."

*(Adapted from Lucado, He Reminded Us of You)*

We have a God who hears us, who puts the power of love behind us, who plants the Holy Spirit within us, and grants all of heaven ahead of us. With God, we have the grace for every sin, direction for every turn, a candle for every corner, and an anchor for every storm.

Amid fear, we need to know that we are not alone. When faith shines, we are reminded that we may be facing death, but we aren't facing death alone; the Lord is with us. We may be facing unemployment, but we aren't facing unemployment alone; the Lord is with us. We may be facing marital struggles, but we aren't facing them alone; the Lord is with us. We may be facing debt, but we aren't facing debt alone; the Lord is with us.

“Our families may turn against us, but God won’t. Our friends may betray us, but God won’t. We may feel alone in the wilderness, but we are not. God is with us.”

(Adapted from Lucado, *Traveling Light*)

Amid fear, we need to hear that God is still in control. When faith shines, we are reminded that it’s not over until God says so. We need to hear that life’s mishaps and tragedies are not a reason to bail out. They are simply a reason to sit tight.

Corrie ten Boom used to say, “When the train goes through a tunnel and the world gets dark, do you jump out? Of course not. You sit still and trust the engineer to get you through.”

Next time we might be disappointed, let’s not panic. Let’s not jump out. Let’s not give up. Let’s be patient and let us remember that God is still in control. It ain’t over till it’s over.

When faith shines, we are reminded that “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” (Psalm 23:6) To read this verse is to open a box of jewels. Each word sparkles and begs to be examined in the face of our doubts: goodness, mercy, all the days, dwell in the house of the Lord forever. These words sweep in on insecurities like a SWAT team on a terrorist.

When faith shines, it is not a maybe or possibly or I have a hunch “goodness and mercy shall follow me”. When faith shines, we are reminded that God is a sure God, who makes promises and provides a sure foundation. Our moods may shift, but God doesn’t. Our minds may change, but God doesn’t. Our devotion may falter, but God’s never does. When faith shines, we know that “Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me.”

When faith shines, we receive both goodness and mercy. Not goodness alone, for we are sinners in need of mercy. Not mercy alone, for we are fragile, in need of goodness. We need them both. And not just some of the time. David declares, “Goodness and mercy shall follow me *all the days of my life*.” Think of the days that lie ahead. What do you see? Days at home with toddlers? God will be with you. Days in a dead-end job? God will walk you through. Days of loneliness? God will take your hand.

\*Excerpts adapted from Lucado, *Safe in the Shepherd’s Arms: Hope and Encouragement from Psalm 23*

Christ is there! And Christ is standing before us saying, “Take courage. Have heart. Go ahead, step out of that boat, and walk to me. Keep your eyes on me. Let your faith shine.”