

Take Heart, It is Jesus!

Mark 6:45-56

⁴⁵Immediately [Jesus] made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. ⁴⁷And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, ⁴⁹but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, ⁵⁰for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” ⁵¹And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵²for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

⁵³When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore.

⁵⁴And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him ⁵⁵and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was.

⁵⁶And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Maybe some of you, like me, thought that when you were growing that you would never ride in an airplane. In fact when I was growing up, I had only met one or two people who had flown on an airplane.

And so it was just shortly after my twenty-first birthday, that I was astounded to find myself sitting on the runway at JFK Airport in New York City. This was the first time I ever was on a plane and I thought, “This seems to be just like riding on a bus that goes up a steep hill (and is noisy!).”

The flight took us over the Atlantic Ocean. Since the plane was not full, I had the opportunity to curl up and take a nap on a row of seats in the rear of the plane. As I tried to sleep, I noticed the flight became a little bit bumpy. I thought to myself, “So this is what it is like to fly on a plane.” I had never been on an airplane before. I didn’t know what the flight was supposed to be like. But as we landed and I was leaving the plane, I overheard one flight attendant say to the other, “That was the roughest ride that I have ever been on in my entire life!”

I probably should have been afraid! But I didn’t know any better. I thought, “That’s how airplane rides are and I suppose that they are a little bumpy now and then.” It turns out that in my ignorance I had confidence. I had no fear. In fact, I had **unfounded** confidence.

In contrast to that, there are some people who have unfounded fear. I don’t want to examine all of the phobias but I have in my life met people who are **terrified** of plastic bugs and rubber snakes. This is **unfounded fear!** (rather than unfounded confidence.)

In our lesson today we see an example of this unfounded fear in the lives of the disciples. To put this in context, we need to remember that over the last several Sundays, we have been reading through Mark 6. Last week the Gospel lesson was the feeding of the 5000. Here Jesus multiplied the loaves and the fishes so that they would be sufficient for the crowd of people.

They were able to eat everything they wanted until they were satisfied. When the meal was over, the disciples were able to gather up twelve basketsful of leftovers.

Immediately after the feeding of the 5000, Jesus made His disciple get into the boat and go before Him to the other side while He dismissed the crowd.

⁴⁶And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

⁴⁷And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land.

It seems as though Jesus needed His own special time to pray and commune with His Father after feeding the 5000. It also seems clear from reading Mark that Jesus has set up this situation: The disciples are on the Sea of Galilee and Jesus is on the mountain. Then this happens:

⁴⁸And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.

The disciples are struggling out there! A number of them are accomplished fisherman and they know how to handle a boat. We know that in ancient times, they did have some ability to sail upwind. Possibly this boat was equipped with oars and the disciples are rowing against the wind.

Have you ever been in that situation? Have you had to paddle upstream in a canoe? You have to paddle quite hard to make any headway. If you paddle half-heartedly, then you will stand still. If you stop paddling, you will go backwards. Possibly this is happening to the disciples. Whatever the situation is, the Bible reports, “they were making headway painfully.” It doesn’t record that the disciples are afraid at this point.

The disciples are mariners. They know what they are doing. The situation is difficult but not something that presents fear to them.

Next we read: “And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea.” The Romans divided night into four watches. The fourth watch was about 3 a. m. to 6 a. m. The disciples have been out there all night rowing. And so it is that in the middle of the night, Jesus comes and walks on the sea.

He meant to pass by. It seems as though He only wanted them to catch a glimpse of Him. Possibly He intended that the sight of Him walking on the sea would give the disciples confidence to keep going, but that’s not what happens. Instead, the Bible reports: “when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, ⁵⁰for they all saw him and were terrified.”

As I was doing research for this sermon, I discovered one scholar who suggested that a proper translation for the disciples being terrified at seeing Jesus would be, “They were freaking out.” Can you imagine the disciples sitting in the boat and at the sight of Jesus, they begin “freaking out”?

We use a slightly different expression in our family. One film has given us one of our favorite quotes. You may have seen the 2001 comedy, “Rat Race.” It was a remake of “It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World.” In Rat Race there is a character played by Rowan Atkinson, the same actor who also plays “Mr. Bean.” In this film he plays an English language challenged tourist named Enrico Pollini.

At one point Enrico's partner does something strange and Enrico responds, "You are giving me the freak out." So that is the expression we use in our family. Whenever we are "freaking out" in our family, we exclaim, "You are giving me the freak out"

So Jesus was giving the disciples the freak out when they see Him walking on the water! "But immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take heart; it is I'". Another way to translate this is, "I am He, stop being afraid. There is no reason here to be freaking out. You have unfounded fear. I am Jesus, the Creator and Redeemer who has fed the 5000. Now, I am walking close to you and you're freaking out."

"Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."⁵¹ And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded,⁵² for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Why are they freaking out? Because they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. When they saw Jesus their hearts should have been overwhelmed with confidence. Instead, they are overwhelmed with fear.

Does that ever happen to us? We too have seen Jesus multiply the loaves and fishes sufficient for the needs in our lives.

As I observed everyone entering church, I didn't see anyone coming in naked! We all have clothes because God has given us house and home, field and cattle and all that we need to support this body and life. And yet when some of us look at the Dow Jones Industrial Average, it's giving us the freak out!

Can you tell me why? We've known Jesus longer than the disciples and we're freaking out because of the economy. Maybe you are not, and God bless you if you are not. But I have to tell you that although I only have a small retirement account, every day I look to see if the numbers of the Dow are green or red.

The economy causes all kinds of people to have the freak out but it ought not to cause you to have the freak out. Because the same Lord Jesus who multiplied the loaves and the fishes takes care of you every day by giving you your daily bread.

Of course (as Pastor Haake used to say) it doesn't mean He gives you your daily cake. That seems to be what is causing people to freak out. I'm not saying that there are no people in country who are having a difficult time because of the economy, certainly there are. But God is not thwarted by bad economic news. He provides loaves and fishes sufficient for our needs. Let our hearts not be hardened like the disciples'.

We have been having countless budget meetings. And I know a number of the members of our congregation are getting the freak out because they think that God isn't going to take care of us next year. Almost every Sunday when I place the offering plates on the altar, I silently pray, "Lord, make these few loaves and fishes sufficient for our needs." And He does! Because He is the One who calms the sea. He is the One who created the universe. But more than that, He is the One who went to the cross. He went to the cross for you! He went to the cross for the entire world so that your sins and failures and freak outs and hardened hearts can all be forgiven and taken away.

Those of you who are around me a lot know that I like to listen to Old Time Radio. One of the discouraging things about listening to Old Time Radio is the realization that virtually every actor in those shows is dead!

Someday whatever budget we come up with be long forgotten. Someone will find in the files and ask, "Do we need this anymore? Let's toss it out." Then someone may look into the records and say "Oh, years ago, Pastor Quardokus was here when this budget was made." It's not going to mean anything. But what will be significant is that when that happens, I will be with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven singing God's praises forever more. I won't give two shakes of a rabbit's tail about the economy in 2009 and 2010! And neither will you because Jesus died on the cross for our sins!

Maybe I should have had the freak out while flying across the Atlantic on my first flight. Definitely you should not have the freak out when you see plastic bugs and rubber snakes. In fact I believe that you and I should never get the freak out because Jesus has promised, "Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age." In order to make that happen, He died and rose again so that we could join Him in eternity.

In Jesus name. Amen.

May the peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Philip Quardokus
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