

**THE SEASON OF FEAR**  
**Matthew 8:23-27**

**Growing in the Seasons of Life Series**  
**October 20, 2013**  
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When I was a young boy in junior high school I would often be at our home alone during the evening hours. We lived in an older two-story brick house with a basement in the St. Anthony Park area of St. Paul. A house like that, of course, would often have lots of creaks, squeaks and strange noises that could be heard.

Staying in that house alone you needed to adjust your hearing to not get too alarmed by the noises you might hear—especially on a cold night when the old furnace would run and when the cold wooden beams in the walls would creak. Good insulation with energy efficient windows weren't used very much in those days.

Now some nights sitting in this creaky house I would become fearful and afraid. My thoughts and imagination, of course, would then sometimes go wild. As a result my response was to fearfully go down into the basement, turn on all the lights, go into every room and look in every corner.

Sometimes I would even call out, "Okay, I know you're there. Come out from behind the washing machine (or from behind the furnace; or from behind the bed in my room.)" It is kind of crazy to talk to an intruder who was not there. Yet it was when I actually saw for myself that no one was hiding in the basement that my fears and imagination were given peace.

I'm sure that each one of you can relate to this story with some fears you may have had or ones you may continue to have. These fears, of course, can be in a variety of areas for a variety of things. Perhaps you have found ways of facing them head on—of going into a basement if you will—to find peace and assurance in your being.

There is some information I found recently which shared how to stay safe in the world today:

1. Avoid riding in automobiles because they are responsible for 20% of all fatal accidents.
2. Do not stay home because 17 % of all accidents occur at home.
3. Avoid walking on streets or sidewalks because 14% of all accidents occur to pedestrians.
4. Avoid traveling by air, rail, or water because 16% of all accidents involve these forms of transportation.
5. Of the remaining 33%, 32% of all deaths occur in hospitals. Above all else, avoid hospitals.

The good news is that only .001% of all deaths occur in worship services each week, and they are usually related to previous physical problems like heart disease. Logic tells us therefore that the safest place for you to be at any given time is in church...it could save your life.

This morning we continue our series, "Growing In the Seasons of Life," by focusing on "The Season of Fear. May the Holy Spirit speak to each one of us today and help relieve whatever fears and anxieties that may plague us.

Now a couple preliminary thoughts on fear: First of all it is important to remember that healthy fear is a gift of God. For example, having a healthy fear can help prevent us from doing some dangerous, risky, scary and sometimes stupid things.

A healthy fear can keep us from driving too fast, from taking dangerous chances, from putting oneself in situations prone to injuries. A healthy fear motivates a person to study more for a test out of fear of failure; to do a better job at work or in an interview; to perform better in music.

I remember my daughter, Karis, when she had just turned 16 and was taking her drivers license driving test. She thought it was going to be a breeze, she had absolutely no fears she might fail. Well, the first attempt she did fail. The second time, however, with a little more fear and diligence she passed with flying colors.

It is often said by professional musicians, business people and even preachers like me that if we don't have a healthy fear, we won't do as well. In fact, we should actually be more concerned about those people who act like they have nothing to fear. A healthy fear is a God-given gift to help us live safer and more productive lives.

A second preliminary idea about healthy fear is to remember that God calls us to "*fear and love him.*" This kind of fear, of course, is not centered in being scared but rather in an awe and wonder of God's power and greatness. It is a reminder that God is God and we are his creation.

One of the major problems in Christianity and in the world today is that many have reduced God to simply a powerless creature who functions like a pal, and who turns a blind eye to our sins and failures. It is, however, only as we fear and love God—as we respect and do our best for his glory—that we will truly follow God as his humble and devoted servant.

So it is important to note that a healthy fear is a gift from God himself. Without some fear and concern we could easily live careless and apathetic lives. And yet the problem with fear is when it becomes unhealthy, when it becomes filled with paranoia and obsessive thoughts.

This kind of fear, of course, can simply make someone have difficulties in their day or can be anywhere on a continuum up to the point of being totally incapacitated by their fear. This fear can cause a person not to sleep, to be difficult to live with up to the point where they can hardly live because they are so afraid of everything. Fear can easily put you in a stranglehold.

Many years ago when I was a pastor in Litchfield, MN, I attended a spiritual renewal retreat at a Roman Catholic convent led by some nuns. One helpful exercise they led us through had us focus on our Gospel reading for this morning from Matthew 8. I'm going to first read this passage again and then lead you in a similar exercise: (Read Matt. 8:23-27)

What I want you to do is to sit back, close your eyes if it would help and imagine this morning that you are in this boat with Jesus. Imagine that a furious storm has come up, that the waves are crashing over the sides getting you wet and that the boat is being tossed to and fro.

As you imagine being in this storm with wind and waves think about the kind of storms, and waves, that are crashing into you these days and rocking your life. Is it the economic uncertainty, the possibility of losing your job, the rising cost of raising a family? Is it a large bill or debt that you worry about paying?

Or are these waves related to your health? Are you facing some major health problems—a disease like cancer, heart disease or chronic pain? Are you concerned about some upcoming tests or about some treatments you need to go through? Are you worried about a family member who is sick, about medical costs, about paying for medications?

Or are these waves that are tossing your boat centered in a conflict in your marriage, in a battle and division in your family or in a falling out and rejection by a friend? Are these waves centered in feelings of feeling like a failure, in wondering what exactly your purpose is in life, or are they centered in your struggles with faith?

Feel these waves crash on you and all around you. Think about these fears in your heart. How does it feel to you that they are completely out of your control, that they are throwing, and tossing, you this way and that? Think about your fears—how do you handle them? How are they affecting you? What affect are these fears having on your relationship with others?

Then think about and picture Jesus, asleep in your boat. What does Jesus look like—his facial features, his eyes, his hands? How does it make you feel that Jesus is right next to you and yet he is asleep as you are consumed by storms, and waves, crashing around you?

Tell Jesus if you are mad at him for what is happening to you. Be as honest as you can letting Jesus know if you believe that life is unfair, if you are angry that he hasn't answered your prayers the way you want him to. Be completely honest with Jesus—he sees this honesty as a true and loving relationship, not as disrespect.

Then like the disciples did cry out to Jesus, *“Lord, save us. We’re going to drown.”* Ask Jesus to help you—he truly wants you to say these words. It is not a sign of weakness, but strength. Ask Jesus right now, each day, to save you from whatever storms you are in.

And then imagine Jesus waking up; asking why you are so afraid; then seeing him rebuke the wind and waves, and seeing complete peace come over the waters. How does this peace feel to you? What does that say about Jesus and the power he has over whatever is troubling your being? Why is faith in Jesus so important?

Now feel the peace of Jesus come into your heart and life. Feel Jesus speaking to the winds of whatever is making you afraid; know that even that problem and concern is in his hands. Allow God's peace to surround you. Allow God's love to calm and take away your fear. Let God's peace wash over you with hope for your daily life and future.

My friend, fear is definitely a reality in life today. May you find help and encouragement as you face whatever challenges and fears that lie before you. And may God's peace, that passes all understanding, fill you with peace and courage as you live each day.