



10.12.25...Why Are You Afraid? | Matthew 8:23-27

What are you afraid of today? Most of us can name something.

Fear. It is one of the most common and haunting emotions of the human heart. And because the Bible is an expert on the human heart; the topic of fear shows up in the Bible from beginning to end. And over and over again, God's people are told, "Do not be afraid."

Some say that command, "Do not be afraid.", appears 365 times—one for every day of the year. While it's not exactly 365 times, the point is clear — God's Word reminds us daily: "Do not be afraid."

Because we live in a culture that thrives on fear. Politicians warn of dangers behind every corner. Advertisers tell us we won't be safe or happy without their products. Even weather reporters stir up fear. The message is the same: be afraid, be very afraid.

But in Matthew 8, Jesus asks His disciples another important question. A question that cuts through all the noise in our culture:

"Why are you afraid?"

It happens in a boat, in the middle of a storm.

Matthew tells us that Jesus and His disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee. To give a little perspective, the boat was maybe twenty-four feet long and the sea itself seven miles across and fourteen miles from end to end. Small boat, big sea.

As they were crossing a furious storm swept over them. The disciples were no longer in control but at the mercy of the wind and water. Waves crashed over the boat. These were seasoned fishermen, but they were terrified.

And where was Jesus? Asleep.

Who knows how long the disciples watched the water in the bottom of their boat rise...past their ankles, mid-calf, just below their knees? But finally, in panic, they shook Jesus awake: "Lord, rescue us! We're going to drown!"

And before Jesus speaks to the storm, He speaks to them: "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?"

Then Jesus turns to the storm and speaks calm to the wind and waves with a word. And now the disciples, dripping wet and slack-jawed, have a question of their own they whisper to one another: "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey Him!"

We know what it feels like to be in that boat. We've all had moments when the wind picked up, and the waves of worry began sloshing over the sides at an alarming rate. When the situation at work, or the health diagnosis, or the uncertainty about the future left us feeling like we were caught in a tremendous storm and about to go under.

And we have prayed, and it felt like Jesus was asleep—silent, distant, unaware of how close we were to sinking.

It's no accident that this story happens on the sea. In the Bible, the sea often represents chaos and death.

In Genesis, the flood wiped out nearly all life. In Exodus, the Red Sea blocked the Israelites' escape from slavery. In Joshua, the Jordan River barred the way into the Promised Land. In the Psalms, sea monsters like Leviathan symbolize all that is menacing in the world.

Fear is like drowning. Overwhelming. Suffocating. Beyond our control. Which makes Jesus' question all the more important. "Why are you afraid?"

Now, I don't know about you, but I have always heard this question from Jesus as a bit of a rebuke or at least disappointment. Do you hear this question as criticism? As if Jesus is scolding them: "What's wrong with you? Don't you trust me by now?"

But what if Jesus' tone was different?

Sharon Ellison, a communication expert, points out that the same question can either escalate or de-escalate tension depending on how it's asked. If I say to you sharply, "Are you upset about something?" it sounds like an interrogation. But if I say softly, "Are you upset about something?" it's an invitation to share.

What if Jesus wasn't scolding His disciples, but inviting them to explore their fear with Him? What if His question was gentle, not accusatory — curious, not critical?

What is it that scares you? What feels like the limit of your faith right now?"

Sometimes the gentlest question is the one that opens the door to peace.

Sometimes fear can get the better of us — and make us do ridiculous things.

There was a pharmacist who kept making mistakes with prescriptions. His boss warned him: "One more slip-up and you're fired."

The very next day, an older gentleman came in with a terrible cough. The pharmacist, flustered and nervous, accidentally filled the prescription with a bottle of strong laxative instead of cough syrup.

When the boss discovered the mistake, he was upset: "Why didn't you give him his cough medicine? Why in the world a laxative?"

The pharmacist pointed out the store window. The old man was desperately clinging to a lamppost no longer coughing. "See?" the pharmacist said. "Now he's too afraid to cough!"

Sometimes we let fear run our lives. Fear convinces us that falsehoods are true. Which is why we need to hear Jesus' question again: "Why are you afraid?"

That joke reminds me of an old fable about a young warrior who had to face fear itself.

There once was a young warrior whose teacher ordered him to go into battle against fear. He didn't want to do that. He told his teacher that it seems too aggressive, it was scary. But the teacher insisted.

The day arrived. The student warrior stood on one side and fear stood on the other. The Warrior was feeling very small and fear was looking very big. Instead of striking at it or waiting for it to strike, the young warrior bowed three times and asked Fear, "May I have permission to go into battle with you?"

Fear said, "Thank you for showing me so much respect that you ask permission."

Then the young warrior asked, "How can I defeat you?"

Fear replied, "My weapons are that I talk fast and I get very close to your face. Then you get completely unnerved, and you do whatever I say. If you don't do what I say or tell you, I have no power over you."

That was how the young warrior learned how to respect but defeat fear.

What are you afraid of? Chances are you are afraid of something. There are valid and plentiful reasons for us to feel fear.

I suspect that whatever the source of your fear is today, you are not alone. It does not take much of a trigger for that fear to escalate the tension you are feeling within yourself.

But you can take heart that Jesus comes to you right now not to raise the tension even further, but to teach you how to de-escalate that tension. Jesus helps us deescalate fear by inviting you to ask simple questions of yourself and of your fears.

Where did you come from?

Is this an early memory?

Do I believe my fear is the truth?

When Wesley was a young missionary, he traveled across the Atlantic. And a terrible storm struck. Waves battered the ship. The English passengers screamed in terror. But a group of German Moravians quietly sang hymns, even as water poured onto the deck.

Afterward, Wesley asked them, "Weren't you afraid?" One answered, "I thank God, no." "But weren't your women and children afraid?" "No," he said, "our women and children are not afraid to die."

Wesley was deeply shaken. He realized that even as a minister, his faith was not yet rooted in the peace of Christ. The Moravians' calm singing planted a seed in him that would eventually grow into his famous heartwarming experience of God's grace.

That storm didn't just test Wesley's faith — it transformed it. Storms have a way of doing that when Christ is near.

And the Moravians didn't just sing — they served. Wesley watched as they helped other passengers, cleaned messes no one else would touch, and met fear with kindness. They faced the storm with courage, faith, and love. Maybe storms can be opportunities?

Here's the truth: in this story, Jesus calms not one storm, but two.

He calms the storm around the disciples — the wind and the waves — but first He speaks to the storm within them — the fear in their hearts.

And He does the same for us.

When fear rises, Jesus doesn't begin with scolding. He begins with a question:

“Why are you afraid?” Not to shame us, but to invite us — to help us name what's really going on inside.

“What story are you telling yourself right now?”

What feels beyond My reach?”

Because that's where faith begins to grow — not in pretending we have no fear, but in bringing our fear honestly to Jesus, helping us see him work in our lives.

And when we do, something shifts. The waves may not stop immediately, but their power over us weakens. Fear begins to lose its grip. Because the One who is greater than the storm is with us in the boat.

The Bible's story is full of moments when God's people faced the sea — Noah in the flood, Moses at the Red Sea, Joshua at the Jordan. Each time, God made a way through. And here again, in a little fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee, God is still making a way — not just through the waters around us, but through the fear within us.

Are you facing a storm today? Where is the wind howling loudest in your life? What waves are crashing over the side of your boat? Or maybe you have a friend or a loved one going through a storm and they need this?

You may not be able to control the storm, but you can remember who's in the boat with you. You can remember that Jesus' question — “Why are you afraid?” — is not a rebuke, but an invitation.

An invitation to bring your fear into His presence. An invitation to trust that even when He seems asleep, He has not forgotten you. An invitation to discover peace not from the absence of storms, but from the presence of Christ.

We think “small boat, big storm” but that's not really accurate, “big storm, bigger God”.

Fear may come knocking — but it doesn't get to steer the boat. Because the One who commands the wind and waves is still in the boat with you.

You can remember that Jesus has calmed storms before — and he will again. Because the same Jesus who calmed the Sea of Galilee, the same Lord who gave courage to the Moravians, the same Savior who eventually warmed and steadied Wesley's heart — he is with you right now.

Hear the Lord's voice above the wind of your storm: “Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid.” Amen.