

No Fear
By Jason Huff
Psalm 27, 1 John 4:9-19, Luke 8:22-39

This week's final passage comes from Luke 8:22-39. Listen now to God's Word from the third Gospel. "One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him." They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places. Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and he gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left. The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him."

This weekend, we celebrate Memorial Day. We honor those who have served our country and defended her in her times of need. It's perhaps our most solemn holiday, the one that reminds us that freedom is not free and that good people sometimes are called upon to give all they have to stop the spread of evil. While we all desire peace, we know that true, lasting peace will only come in the Kingdom of God. So we thank those who have given of themselves in service to us. Bravery, whether it comes on the battlefield or in our everyday lives and experiences, doesn't come easily to us. One quote attributed to George S. Patton says this: "If we take the generally accepted definition of bravery as a quality which knows no fear, I have never seen a brave man. All men are frightened. The more intelligent they are, the more they are frightened." As Mark Twain wrote, "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear – not absence of fear." In the face of uncertain times and economic woes, we too must learn bravery and courage.

Our Scripture passage today tells us about two different kinds of fear, both good and bad. It tells us how we might overcome our fear, and it describes for us how the right kind of fear can motivate us on to true discipleship and real courage. Let's look at it together. Jesus and the disciples are heading out on the Sea of Galilee. For whatever reason, they are heading to "the other side." This means that they are actually heading away from Jewish territory and into Gentile territory. The disciples are a little nervous about this; they aren't sure why Jesus wants to go there. But because their master has commanded it, they put out the boat. Now the Sea of Galilee is about 8 miles across, so it's not huge, but we don't know if they were trying to make good time or if they were trying to catch some fish too. Either way, Jesus falls asleep. He's in good hands, because we know that several of the disciples were professional fisherman.

But there's a problem, and that's the unpredictability of the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee itself is 680 miles below sea level, which creates warm moist air right at the sea itself. Along the eastern edge are a series of gigantic cliffs that are over 2000 feet high, and they bring in cool dry air. When those two different weather patterns meet over the water, it's not pretty, and so the Sea of Galilee is known for having incredible storms that come up at a moment's notice. For example, in 1992 the nearby city of Tiberius was deluged with 10 foot waves that swept through downtown during a particularly fierce storm.

This is the kind of storm that hits the disciples' boat. They start taking on water really quick. They are in genuine danger. If the storm keeps up, the boat's going to go under, and they'll be out at least a couple of miles from shore in the midst of it. They are terrified. They go to Jesus and wake Him up. It seems to say a lot about Jesus that He could sleep in the middle of such a fierce storm. But it also says a lot about the disciples just how frightened they are with Jesus in their midst. In our translation this morning, they say, "We're going to drown." But their words are more fearful than that. In the Greek, the disciples say, "We're dying! We're perishing!" These guys who know a lot more about fishing and the water than Jesus are coming to Him telling Him that all hope is lost.

So Jesus gets up and has words with the storm. The text says He rebuked the wind and the waves. It's the same word in the Greek used when Jesus rebukes a fever and rebukes demons in Luke chapter 4. Just as Jesus has power over the supernatural and power over disease, He now shows that He has power over the forces of nature. There is nothing it seems that Jesus can't do!

And this is the hinge point of the first part of the story. Jesus asks the disciples, "Where is your faith?" He has shown time and again that He is the Son of God. He hasn't had to say it; His power should have proved it. But the disciples just couldn't put it all together. Yes, He could control disease; yes, He could cast out demons. But in their minds, they were thinking, maybe that's all He can do. Jesus had never done anything like this in front of them. But what's important is this: the disciples respond with fear and amazement. They are no longer scared of the storm. They have already forgotten the danger. Now they are dumbstruck at the power of Jesus to control the storm. They're still terrified, but because they realize that Jesus is so much more than an ordinary man.

The fear they have has shifted, and the fear they have is actually a good fear. It's a rational fear. It's the kind of fear that can motivate us. Now as strange as it sounds, their fear of

the storm was irrational. Was it an awful storm? Yes. But they had Jesus with them, the Jesus who had already shown time and again His power. Jesus slept through the storm. Maybe they thought He was exhausted. Maybe they thought He was so shot that He could sleep through anything. But Jesus slept because He knew He and the disciples were safe. And the disciples should have known it too. Often times we fall into the same kind of fear. We despair that God doesn't care about us. We worry that God will fail us. We've prayed to Him, we belong to a group of believers in a church, we've seen His power, we know He is right alongside us, but we still somehow think He can't quiet the storms. But time and again, God proves Himself faithful. Psalm 34:8-9 combines the thought of tasting God's goodness and fearing Him the right way. The psalm says, "Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing." The disciples failed only when they lost their trust in what Jesus could do.

In comparison, the fear that the disciples had after Jesus calmed the storm was an awestruck fear, a fear that comes from knowing the awesome authority of the God of the universe. It's realizing that the God you serve has control over life and death and eternity, that, as Matthew 10:29 tells us, "Not even a sparrow, worth half a penny, can fall to the ground apart from your Father." Proverbs 9:10 tells us, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." The fear of God is what makes you realize that there is nothing else in this entire universe to be afraid of. As Romans 8:31 says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

So the goal of this fear, the proper fear of God, is not for us to be terrified, but to be sure we are on God's side. When we fear God, we consider carefully what He would want us to do. When we fear God, we start watching what we say to make sure it's pleasing to Him. When we fear God, we realize that we are free from sin through Christ and free to be righteous, and we desire that righteousness so that we can become more like the God we worship. And we come to realize that this fear, this holy fear, this desire to be on the right side of eternal history, makes God delight in us. Psalm 147:10 says, "God does not delight in the strength of a horse, nor does He take pleasure in the speed of a runner. The LORD delights in those who fear Him, in those who put their hope in His unfailing love." We find that, after a while, this fear of the LORD is hardly fear at all, but simply faith that God will do what He promises.

Through the fear of the LORD, we can conquer all our earthly fears. Dr. E. Stanley Jones, who was called the "Billy Graham of India" for his thousands of missionary lectures across that nation, put it this way. "I am inwardly fashioned for faith, not for fear. Fear is not my native land; faith is. I am so made that worry and anxiety are sand in the machinery of life; faith is the oil. I live better by faith and confidence than by fear, doubt and anxiety. In anxiety and worry, my being is gasping for breath--these are not my native air. But in faith and confidence, I breathe freely--these are my native air. A John Hopkins University doctor says, "We do not know why it is that worriers die sooner than the non-worriers, but that is a fact." But I, who am simple of mind, think I know; We are inwardly constructed in nerve and tissue, brain cell and soul, for faith and not for fear. God made us that way. To live by worry is to live against reality." The fear of God doesn't breed worry; it breeds courage in us to fight off the fears of this world.

Moving on to the second part of the story...Jesus goes into the region of the Gerasenes, where He meets a man infested by demons. This situation is far more charged than any other

we've read about in Luke because we know this man is dangerous. Nobody can control him. He's incredibly strong, and he's been out naked living in the tombs outside the city. And this is not a situation of some mental illness; the spirits inside this man declare who Jesus is, the Son of the Most High God. And while the spirits could be lying, "legion" comes from the name a unit of several thousand Roman soldiers. We're talking about a huge number of spirits that have taken up residence inside this man. From an earthly perspective, there would be reason to be afraid. But Jesus has control of this situation too. With just a word, He drives the demons out of the man and allows them to go into a nearby herd of pigs. In a moment, the pigs rush down the bank into the lake and drown. Now this is some scary stuff – you could make a horror movie about this part of the reading.

So it's really surprising to us how it all ends. This is not your typical story where the bad guys are defeated and the good guys triumph and everyone goes home and has a beer. Word spreads about what Jesus has done; the guys who'd been tending the pigs went and told everyone what had happened. They came and they saw for themselves. This man that everybody knew was now perfectly fine. All was good, right! But no! For the first time, we're told that they are afraid. Same root word in Greek as what the disciples had. It's the same fear, it's *phobos*, where we get the word "phobia." But they weren't afraid of Jesus. They were afraid of what had happened to the man.

You'd think they'd be happy! This man was a threat to them. Nobody would have ever gone out alone to the tombs alone with him there. Now he can be a part of society again. He's no longer an outcast. But the townspeople fear this change more than they feared the danger they knew and understood. They are scared of Jesus' power too, but they let their fear get the best of them. They don't see what the disciples see. Instead, they panic. They see a herd of dead pigs and a crazy man made well, and it's too much for them. Their fear is the negative kind of fear, the fear where the desire to do what is right is covered up by the terror of the moment.

Now some people have asked – what did Jesus have against the pigs? The Jews would have seen them as unclean animals and thus a fine place for a pack of demons to go. But didn't Jesus know that this might damage somebody's livelihood? Jesus knew all this. But yet, there was something to be learned from this incident. Evil is destructive. Whenever we choose to sin rather than to follow God's ways, we are acting destructively too. When those pigs ran down the bank, it was showing the destructiveness of evil that was masked in the man. The man lived among dead bodies; he was dead to his community. But he had been brought back to life! The loss of a herd of pigs was nothing in comparison to a human who was dead inside who was brought back from the grave.

But the Gerasenes saw firsthand what following Jesus could cost them. Their fear of God was overwhelmed by their fear of loss. They knew that listening to Jesus could mean that their livelihood might be affected. They might be asked to give up their homes, their wealth, their possessions to follow Him. And they were afraid. The text says that they were seized by fear; they were held prisoner to it. Last week, we heard Jesus' teaching how some would not be able to mature in faith because the concerns of the world choked it out. That's what happened here.

But Jesus doesn't leave them alone with their fear. He sends the man who has been healed to them. Now this is a unique case. In every other situation so far, Jesus has allowed

those who have been cured and exorcised to come along with Him. This time, Jesus says no. Instead, Jesus sends the man to his people as a missionary to them, so that when the time is right, when their fear has subsided, they will have the man as a living witness to them of Jesus' power, his authority, and his ability to forgive sin and evil and to banish it. Though they've made the wrong choice this time, Jesus does not abandon them to their fears. He makes sure they will have what they need to eventually overcome them.

Our choice today is similar to that of the early disciples. We have the choice to fear God and have no other fears, or we can let our fears hold us captive. Paul knew this issue well. As a disciple, he faced a lot that would have caused most of us to lose hope in God. In 2 Corinthians, we hear just what all he faced as he preached the Gospel. He says, "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers." If anyone had reason to fear, Paul did. And yet in the same letter, he says this: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed...therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

God's call on us this Memorial Day weekend is to be courageous for Him. Don't be discouraged by setbacks you might be having. Don't be distressed when you have problems. If you are following after God and asking Him to lead your paths, you will not have an easy life, but you will have one that pleases God and delights Him.

We are going to be singing a few songs after the sermon today, and I want you to listen to the words of them. One of them is, "You Are My Hiding Place." It says, "You always fill my heart with songs of deliverance whenever I am afraid – I will trust in You." God promises to deliver us – in the midst of our fears, He will pull us through. Another one we'll sing is "Be Bold, Be Strong." It reminds us, "do not be afraid, do not be dismayed, for the Lord our God is with thee." And the final song is "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." It tells us that God gives us "strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow." God wants us to put our faith and trust, our admiration and fear, in Him. When we do that, no fear can conquer us and nothing the enemy throws at us will do us permanent harm. Time and again, when God and His angels appeared to Moses, to Abraham, to the shepherds on the night Christ was born, we hear the refrain, "Have no fear." May this be true for all of us as we live lives that reflect the awesome wonder of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray.