

# Fear not

Matthew 14:22-33

What a strong and fearful storm it was! Last week many of us lost electricity and even internet resulting from the strong gusty wind of Hurricane Isaias. Some still don't have power. I recalled around 1:30 pm on Tuesday afternoon, I got a texting from the national emergency center, saying, "Tornado warning in Fairfield County! Find a basement. Go down to the lower floor if you don't have a basement. Stop driving if you drive now and find a shelter immediately!" It was a scary afternoon. Trees were bending back and forth crazy. They looked like iron bars melting to me. Yes, I heard some tree branches being knocked down near and far. It was a fearful afternoon.

Fear is something we all have. Fear helps us to stay safe away from fire or tornado or hurricane. But some fears imprison us and keep us from living freely and confidently as God's children.

What fear do you have? Some are afraid of darkness. Some of tigers, lions or snakes. Some fear of being alone.

I was afraid of water for a while. By now, many of you know that I am a twin and my younger twin brother, Albert drowned at Redondo Beach in the Pacific Ocean while enjoying boogie boarding about 40 years ago. He was only 21 years old then. I was scared when they said, "if one of the twins died, the other followed his or her dead twin soon." And I stopped visiting Redondo Beach in Torrance, CA where I used to go almost every

weekend. The Pacific Ocean was not a pleasant and peaceful ocean any longer to me.

Some are afraid of people, particular people who have different skin color, different language, different culture, different nationality, different sexual orientation, etc. Some are afraid of not saving enough for retirement.

We are afraid of encountering tragic accidents. We are afraid of having cancers. We all are afraid of being rejected. We all fear we might be ignored. We are afraid of the future. We are afraid of the past. We are afraid of life. We are afraid of death.

There is one more fear that many suffer from. That is the fear of God. It is the fear that God does not love me. It is the fear that God does not care about me.

There seems to be no limit to our fears. It might be okay to call us panphobic or omniphobic, those who fear everything.

But know what the message of the Bible says over and over. "fear not!"

When Abram took his family to the unknown country, he feared the future full of uncertainty and insecurity. God spoke to him: Fear not Abram, I am your shield and your reward will be great. (Genesis 15:1)

When the Hebrews stood at the Red Sea in front, being chased by Pharaoh's chariots behind, they cried out that they would all be

killed. Moses said to them: Stand still, fear not, and see the salvation of the Lord. (Exodus 14:13)

When the angel of the Lord came to Mary and said that she would bear a child, she trembled with fear. Angel Gabriel said to her, "Fear not Mary, for you have found favor with God. (Luke 1:30)

When Jesus heard Jairus' daughter had died, he said, "Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole." (Luke 8:50)

Jesus said, "But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: you are of more value than many sparrows." (Luke 12:7)

John the Apostle tells us in his letter, "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, "Fear not; I am the first and the last." (Revelation 1:17)

"Fear not!" is the message of the Bible.

Words like "Fear not" and "Do not be afraid" occurs in the Bible over 300 times. Some argues 365 times, one for every day of the year. Others go further, saying 366 times one for every day of the year, including the leap year.

Look at Simon Peter. He is my second most favorite disciple next to Doubting Thomas, the Twin. Peter and his friends were out in the boat crossing the lake of Galilee after a long day with the crowds. Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.

When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

Don't you like Peter, spontaneous and courageous? You might say he was crazy. But I am amazed by his faith in Jesus. I think he had a strong faith in Jesus and did what Jesus commanded without hesitation. "Come." Peter stepped out of the boat into the storm and came toward Jesus. Look at what happened to Peter. He walked on the water. He did it. Wow. Wow.

But it did not last long. When he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened and began to sink. Fear rose and his body sank. Doubt rose and his body sank.

This story is our story. How often do we get caught between Christ and the strong windy waves? I don't know about you. But I often find myself caught midway between faith and doubt like Peter. I doubt my walk. I fear the storm around me. And I fall beneath the waves. I doubt that God may not know me and care about me. I wonder if God listens to my personal and intercessory prayers and answers them. And I often see myself sinking all the way down beneath the waves.

But this story also is a good news we all need to hear and remember. This story shows that if we sink resulting from fear and doubt and if we feel being swollen by big waves, there is something we can do. That is, we can turn to Jesus and call on our savior.

“Lord, I am perishing. Help me! Lord I am sinking. Rescue me!” Then we hear Jesus’ gentle voice, “I am here. Do not fear. You are mine and I am yours.” “Turn your eyes upon Jesus and look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.”

I don't know what storm of life will come your way this week and this year, or what storm you may be enduring at this very moment and for the rest of your life. But we do know this: even as the storm rages around us, if we put our trust in the Lord (Psalm 56:3) we will hear a gentle voice calling to us, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid. I am here with you." (Matt 14:27)

The whole world has been in the middle of the dangerous storm, the Covid-19 pandemic. We do not know how long it would stay with us. We do not know when it would be over. A scientist said we might need to live with this dangerous storm for a long time. But we do know we do have God whose gentle voice speaks, “do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)

Even if you get a bad medical report, God who loves you and cares about you is going to be the same. Even if you are diagnosed of a terminal cancer, God is going to be the same. Yes, even if a war takes place tomorrow abruptly, even if another pandemic appears this fall again, God is still going to be the same, who loves and cares about us.

This is the good news to hold on. This is the salvation and hope to lift us up. So we shout joyfully and thankfully again, "God is good all the time. All the time God is good."

When I got the first appointment to serve a church in San Diego, CA, I had an unforgettable experience. Every Monday, which was day off, I spent a good number of hours lying at the swimming pool, enjoying Southern California's sunshining and warm weather. I was still afraid of water due to my twin brother's drowning accident, then. But one day, I decided to learn how to swim. I called one of my friends, Jay who did swimming exercise regularly in New York and asked him to teach me how to swim. He said, "Just trust the water, and you will be ready to swim." "That sounds easy!" I threw my body into the water and tried to trust the water. "Here I am. I trust you, water." But to no avail. Easier said than done. How much water did I drink while trying to trust the water? Then, one day after about a month later, to my big surprise, I discovered myself floating in the water. I did not do anything extra to make myself floating. I just did nothing. But I was held up by water and able to enjoy appreciating a beautiful Southern California evening sky.

It was a God moment, Kairos moment. I was set free from the fear of water. I was set free to enjoy free ride. Then, I was awakened to realize that is exactly what we can experience when we trust God alone. Like water holds me up, I sensed God's gentle but strong arms holding me up. What an enlightened moment to me.

God is ready and available all the time to hold you up. Putting a total faith in God, and you will feel it and know it and enjoy it and give thanks to God spontaneously.

Rev Harry Emerson Fosdick put it this way succinctly.

Fear imprisons, faith liberates;  
fear paralyzes, faith empowers;  
fear disheartens, faith encourages;  
fear sickens, faith heals;  
fear makes useless, faith makes serviceable -  
And, most of all,  
Fear puts hopelessness at the heart of life,  
While faith rejoices in God.

“Fear has no home when Christ Jesus is in you.” (Mark Farmer)

“Fear has no home when we are in Christ Jesus.” (Kun Sam Cho)

Yes, we live by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:6,7)

Hallelujah! Amen.