

Time After Pentecost – Lectionary 12
June 21, 2009
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Job 38:1-11
2 Corinthians 6:1-13
Mark 4:35-41

Growing up, one of the things I learned early was that it was not okay to be scared, to have fear. This was instilled in me by playing tackle football with the older boys in the neighborhood, and reinforced by coaches and other men throughout the years. One of my mantras in life was, “I have no fear.”

This attitude served me well for many years. By having no tolerance for fear in my life, I was able to push through many nerve-racking situations, showing no fear, having no fear, or at least it was buried so deep inside of me, and was hated by me so much, it was pushed deeper and deeper; not allowed to come out, at least in healthy ways. I, like many boys and men, didn’t allow myself to be scared.

On the day we honor fathers and male mentors, we can say that men come from a long tradition of hiding, suppressing, not tolerating fear. Even back in Jesus’ day, men were trained to behave bravely, especially as they faced a dangerous situation. A public expression of fear was not acceptable; it was shameful. Let’s look at our Gospel lesson for a little more about fear.

At the end of a busy day, Jesus suggests to his disciples that they cross the Sea of Galilee to the other side. Jesus is with his disciples many of whom are competent sailors and fishermen. On the boat he finds a comfortable place and decides to take a nap. Perhaps he’s sleeping because he’s at peace; trusting God. And also trusting his friends and their skills, judgments, and abilities to sail the ship. They’re familiar with the sea; they’ve navigated it many times, both in calm and troubled waters. Jesus puts his trust in the hands of his friends, he trusts God and tries to get some much needed rest.

Suddenly, as was typical, a storm comes in and the men running the boat get scared, they panic, and they don’t hide it. This was very risky. By showing their fear, they risked losing face, losing honor, if anyone catches them in this state. So these men, against their upbringing, against their culture, have the courage to be vulnerable in front of Jesus, showing that they are scared. They frantically wake Jesus up. Jesus looks at them. Sees this terrible storm and all the water in the boat and he says, “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” The disciples were panicking. They had lost their compass. They didn’t know where they were going. Their confidence was shattered. What happens to them is that they become very anxious and reactive. They sense great danger. They panicked. Men are not cool with this. We don’t like it when this happens;

when we lose control. This often triggers another feeling – anger. Another feeling like fear that we don't know what to do with; that we don't know how to manage.

In the face of fear, Jesus radiates calm. He even calms the waters while calming the disciples. Here is the message I want to communicate today, especially to boys, to men, and to fathers – that fear, that being scared is natural and normal, to be expected at certain times. And just because you and I have been trained to push it away or way down inside, to act brave, that doesn't mean that we're not scared or afraid, it just means that we're bottling it up.

So, I commend the disciples for acknowledging what they were feeling and who better to go to than Jesus when we're afraid. We're not in charge of what we feel.

We are in charge of how we handle it and what we do in situations, especially in situations that make us afraid.

Jesus' friends were very afraid and they admitted it, despite the societal pressure not to. They went and found Jesus. This is a good model. When we acknowledge and are aware of our true feelings, when we disclose them, some of the power is taken away over us, the anxiety is lowered merely by being aware of, in touch with our feelings. In the face of real fear to say, "I admit I am scared; I need your help, God," is much more helpful than, "I'm not a scaredy cat; I can do it myself."

So Jesus fostered an environment where manly outdoor fishermen could freak out, they could panic, they could run scared to him and still be loved. Jesus lowered their anxiety by helping calm the storm, and calming their nerves. They scream as they walk up to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we're perishing?" He wakes up, rebukes the wind, he says to the sea, be still; the wind ceases and there is dead calm. He says to them, "Why are you afraid? You still don't have faith?"

So today I am encouraging us all to fully feel our fear and then bring it to Jesus. Jesus can calm the greatest storms in our lives. On this Father's Day, one of the greatest gifts that fathers can give to their children is to admit that they are scared and disclose all feelings, for that matter. When we're open instead of closed, we teach our children to be real and authentic instead of actors. Acting like everything is okay. Acting like we never get scared or sad or angry. The good news today is that Jesus encourages us to authentically bring our concerns, our anxieties and our fears to him. He doesn't even mind being woken up to hear about our fears.

The freeing message today is that we can experience what we are truly feeling, knowing that Jesus calms the storms in our hearts and in our lives.

Let us pray:

God, we thank you for the calming presence of your Son. Help us to bring our fears, our troubles, our anxieties to Jesus. Help us to show people who we mentor and our children a model of what this looks like. Help us to be real and authentic. Help us to disclose instead of withhold.

We thank you for your Son who accepts us as we are; who accepted the disciples who ran to him in a great panic. He didn't ridicule them; he didn't shun them or say you're not a man if you're scared. He said, "Be not afraid; you've come to the right person."

Help us to take our fears to you, God. Amen.