

Proper 7: Mark 4:35-41

Fear Not. Have Faith:

The Very Busy Day Part I

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be acceptable to you O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. +

Good morning! It's yet another rainy day – good reading weather – and I have good books on my mind. We all have favorite books in our lives, books that have influenced us in so many ways. I'm remembering rainy days spent reading to my daughter Lilly when she was little, and how our books have given us favorite expressions that we've used with each other ever since. One of our expressions is adapted from the chapter titles of our favorite book, Winnie The Pooh, and I'll bet you might remember how they went: "*Chapter Two, In Which Piglet has a Very Busy Day.*" Lill is twenty years old now, but we still use the term "Very Busy Day" as shorthand with each other to say that one of us has had a totally overwhelming and impossibly full day.

We just heard from one of our *very* favorite and most influential books of all: The Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ. In our text this morning, our Lord Jesus is having just that: a Very Busy Day indeed. He has begun the day with a long set of teaching parables: one right after another, he has taught the parables of the Sower, the Lamp under the Bushel Basket, the Growing Seed, and the Mustard Seed. He is teaching to a crowd so big that he has to get into a boat to sit down and preach to them from there. He has taken private time that day with his disciples to "decipher" these parables for them: in fact, Mark's Gospel is recognizable for its' portrayal of the disciples as being particularly challenging to teach, to put it kindly. Jesus parses out each parable for them. He then follows this intensive teaching time with four miracles that same day: the stilling of the storm, the healing of the Gerasene demoniac, the healing of the hemorrhagic woman, and the resurrection of the little girl – all while traveling back and forth by boat. Our Lord was clearly wasting no time: knowing his days on earth were short, he condensed what we might have assumed had happened over a long stretch of time – four prominent teachings, and four absolute miracles - into one single day. I wonder what he was hoping for, pushing ahead with such intensity? What change was he trying to bring?

In classic Marcan style, we get to hear Jesus simply *tell* us the answer. After teaching the parables, he falls asleep on the little boat on its' way to the land of the Gerasenes. The great storm comes up, and huge waves beat into the boat. The disciples wake him in a panic, afraid for their lives, and Jesus calms the storm with the clear command: "*Peace! Be still!*" And then he gives us our answer:

"He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

Jesus has said and done everything he did on this Very Busy Day to help them to understand who he is, so that they might have faith in him, and never be afraid again. This might sound very simple – phrases like these - “Have Faith” and “Don’t Fear” - are so familiar to us that they almost become background noise. But if we consider it all more deeply, isn’t this the hardest thing of all? Jesus wants us to put our trust in God, and let our fears drop away. It’s as clear as that.

As wonderful a book as Winnie The Pooh is, there’s a new book I’m reading called “*The Shack*.” In it the author suggests something that I believe might be true: that the number one mistake we humans make in relation to God, our biggest sin if you will, is that we want our independence. We want to depend on ourselves; we want to have faith in ourselves. We want to try to do everything on our own; no help necessary, thanks for asking. Our culture applauds this; we are taught as individuals, and even as a country, that it’s good to say, “*You can believe in me,*” or “*Here, let me help you.*” We’re trained as children to say this, and to regard helpfulness highly. And rightly so, to a point. Of course we want to be helpful; at it’s best, helpfulness is certainly a manifestation of kindness and love. But it can hide a deeper, self serving need: when we’re taught to value helping over being helped, then what we might really be saying is, “*Here, let me be the helper, the one with knowledge or skill or usefulness. I’ll be the one in power; you be the one who needs me.*” It’s a mind-set that goes way back – all the way back to the Garden, in fact. The fracture that occurred when we as humankind disobeyed God and broke from our dependence, choosing instead to live independent of God’s wishes, is the fracture that keeps playing itself out in our lives today. It is this fracture that Jesus is addressing on this Very Busy Day, as he pulls out almost all the stops to show that the *only* one who should be totally relied on for help is him, God incarnate.

“He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

All the teaching stories, and all the miracles, were about the power of God, and Jesus’ identity as that God incarnate. We as humankind have such a hard time with this issue of power. Learning that we are not to be the ones in power is, I think, our hardest lesson. We know – because Jesus taught us – that we are here to learn to love God, and to love each other. But what I think we might miss in these commandments is the deeper truth that to learn to *truly love* requires that we learn to give up our power, and to give up our independence. Like a persistent weed with deep roots, this unconscious need for a power differential can creep into the nooks and crannies of our relationships, and weeding it out is hard, especially for anyone who has suffered abuses of power or trust. We defend ourselves, protect ourselves, from this vulnerability by hedging ourselves all around with our self-sufficiency and our independence, and we call it freedom.

But Jesus teaches us to open our hearts to each other, to deepen our capacity to love and trust one another, all the while reminding us to put our ultimate trust in him. Jesus shows us that if we want to truly love, we must let go of our need for power, allowing him the power in our relationship. Jesus teaches us not to confuse love with dependence, unless we consider a *much more radical dependence*: we must see each other as equal in every way; each valuable and precious in God’s eyes, each of us meant to depend on one another to a certain degree, accepting the fallibility of our natures. But Jesus teaches us to save our ultimate dependence, almost like a form of personal purity, saved for God alone.

I think that *this* is where we finally find our safe harbor, our peace, and our freedom. Almighty God is absolute, and we can rest in that. The Great I Am created us out of love, and wants us back, and we can depend on that. The Creator of the Cosmos eventually did pull out all the stops for us - allowing the nails, and the crown, and the spear, and the tomb, to rise and live again among us – that wildest miracle of all – to help us, like those disciples on the storm-tossed boat, understand that we can absolutely depend on him, and that we do not need to be afraid of anything any more.

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