

This topic needs no introduction. It's as common as the cold and as reoccurring as the sunrise. By definition it is an unpleasant emotion associated with real or imagined danger. If you need a relevant subject to get your attention, this is it. It was actually difficult to pick just one story from the Bible to begin our series, but we do well to start with Jesus as we begin.

Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!” He replied, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”
Matthew 8:23-27

This story is actually a very good introduction to our theme. It takes place in everyday life, especially if you are a fisherman. The intensity of it is seemingly at a new level for the disciples. That fits for the intensity of life that we feel. In many ways our situation appears out of control, just like the storm they faced.

The word for storm is “seismos.” “A furious storm came up.” (verse 24) It is often translated shook, like a glass of water in the hand of a giant. We use the word for the study of earthquakes. It is interesting to realize that the boat was about 26 feet by 7 feet; the capacity was around 20 people. It was common for storms to come suddenly on the Sea of Galilee (13 miles by 7 miles), trapping the strait winds on that large freshwater basin, causing waves to swirl as high as 20 feet. The disciples were obviously full of fear.

✎ **The Eschatology of fear:** “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”(Genesis 1:26) There was what? Harmony and no fear. The way that life began in Genesis will one day be restored by God, both for man and for his creation. Man’s sin entered the world (Genesis 3), and with it, the earth’s corruption. We have natural disaster, pain, war, injustice, sickness, hunger, plagues, and all kinds of evil. The influence of Satan has gained a foothold and his schemes are prevalent. From the beginning God planned to rescue both man and the earth by reversing the curse. In Christ’s first coming he humbled himself as a human being and died on the cross and was raised from the grave to redeem man from sin. However, we still long for the second coming because it will be the restoration of the earth and the redeeming of the whole creation for all eternity. With this new heaven and new earth, there will be no fear.

“What kind of man is this?” (Matthew 8:27) In the same account from Mark 4:41 the question is simply, “Who is this?” In this story Jesus is showing that he has power over nature and it is a foreshadowing of God’s ultimate plan to restore the earth. Jesus is the key then, now and forever.

✎ **The Psychology of fear:** It is completely evident that fear is an intruder. Fear is rude, self-seeking and totally dominating. Fear is like the neighborhood bully — brash, loud and unproductive. In Mark 4:37-38, as written on the front of the bulletin, we read the disciples response, “Jesus, don’t you care if we drown?”

- ✓ doubt - It erodes our confidence about God’s goodness . . . He doesn’t care.
- ✓ anger - The disciples are annoyed. Fear corners us so we lash out . . . How can you sleep?!
- ✓ forget - Is Jesus trustworthy? . . . What have you done for me lately?
- ✓ dread - Pessimism invades, and contentment and love shrivel up . . . We are going to drown.

✎ **The Theology of fear:** There is a solution. It comes out in the words that Jesus says to his disciples, “You of little faith, why are you afraid?” (Matthew 8:26) The issue is faith. Jesus describes their response as little. The idea is with little faith there is much fear. Feed your fears and your faith will starve; feed your faith and fear will have nothing to feed on. Faith and fear cannot live equally. Faith pushes out fear. **Psalm 107:23-30** are the very words that Jesus fulfills. He is revealing himself as the Alpha and the Omega. He is from the beginning and he will be until the end. The promise of this Psalm is fulfilled by Jesus because Jesus is the fulfillment of both the restoration of mankind and one day restoration of the earth. Today, the answer is faith.

Conclusion: The goal of this series is that you might fear less a month from now that you do today. Are you willing and ready to trust Jesus? When you are in the doctor’s office waiting for a diagnosis are you willing to trust him? When you are in the middle of a bitter dispute are you willing to trust him? When you are making a change in your career path are you willing to trust him? When you are challenged by sudden disappointments or a turn of events that were unexpected, are you willing to trust him? One day, the promise of Jesus is absolute restoration with a new heaven and new earth, but today the solution is trust.

Reflective Questions:

1. How relevant is fear? Does fear affect you little or often? Why?
2. What are the causes of fear? Why is our world more fearful now than in the 1950's according to studies?
3. What stands out to you in the story about Jesus and the disciples in the boat? How can you relate to their situation? What was the main issue in this event?
4. Does the restoration of a new heaven and a new earth give you hope? Why? Does that help you to trust more? How is God calling you to trust him?

Reading Schedule for May 3rd—9th, 2010

This is our week with Esther. I hope you enjoy getting to know Esther on a deeper level. We will read her story and ask God how we are to apply it to our lives. Esther is a woman of courage. The hinge verse is common to us, "And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this." (4:14) Because of Queen Esther's courageous act a whole nation was saved. Seeing her God-given opportunity, she seized it. Her life made a difference. May her life inspire you.

May 3: **Esther 2:1-23** – "Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti." (verse 17) This is the beginning of our story. The Lord put the favor and attraction for Esther in the heart of the king. No human opposition would get in the way of God's plan. God is at work even when we cannot see anything happening. The Lord loves you like he loves Esther. He has good plans for you. He always has your best in mind. What impresses you about Esther? What stands out to you in this chapter? How are you encouraged?

May 4: **Esther 3:1-15** – "So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. 'Keep the money,' the king said to Haman, 'and do with the people as you please.'" (vv. 10 & 11) This does not seem like something positive whatsoever. There is an evil man that has the power to exterminate God's chosen people. He is like a Hitler, however God's plans cannot be stopped. Haman was doomed to fail. How does it seem like the devil has an upper hand in this situation? Are there times in your life when you feel like things are doomed for you? Don't lose heart yet, read the rest of the story.

May 5: **Esther 4:1-17** – "'For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?'" (verse 14) God is not specifically mentioned in the Book of Esther, but his hand is evident throughout. He would be stirring in the heart of Esther the need to be courageous. Esther asked the Jews to pray for her. She is a very wise woman and she also will show her wisdom in the next chapter. What does this say about one's purpose? Why is it important to know your God-given purpose? How do you perceive your purpose?

May 6: **Esther 5:1-14** – "His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, 'Have a gallows built, seventy-five feet high, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then go with the king to the dinner and be happy.' This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the gallows built." (verse 14) Again it looks like Haman has a plan that is going to work. Even his family is a part of the demise. He would build gallows seventy-five feet high so that everyone could see Mordecai's death. Ironically these high gallows allowed everyone to see Haman's death. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." Jesus prayed, "Deliver us from the evil one." You can have confidence that God is bigger than any evil. How does this story affirm that truth?

May 7: **Esther 6:1-7:10** – "So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided." (7:10) Proverbs 26:27 teaches that a person who digs a pit for others will fall into it himself. The king discovered Haman's true intentions. Justice was served. What gets your attention in these two chapters? How does it encourage you? In prayer, tell God that you are confident in him and that you can trust him.

May 8: **Job 1:1-22** – "In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters." (vv. 1 & 2) We will read an introduction to Job and then we will skip to the time when everything is restored to him by the gracious hand of God. What happens to Job is not about Job's disobedience. Life is not always predictable with a cause and effect outcome. Job would learn about a faith that would be built on the confidence that God's ultimate purpose will come to pass. The immediate situation was horrible, but God would fulfill his purpose as he promised in Romans 8:28. What do you learn in this chapter? How do you respond to Satan's desire to test Job? Do you ever believe that happens to you? Why?

May 9: **Job 2:1-13** – "His wife said to him, 'Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!' He replied, 'You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?' In all this, Job did not sin in what he said." (vv. 9 & 10) There is hardly a more powerful verse in all the Bible about a man who would continue to honor God in spite of immense troubles. The difficulty now came to him personally. Faith in God does not guarantee personal prosperity and a lack of faith does not guarantee troubles in this life. It is not a cause and effect. He did not know why this was happening to him, but he still had faith. What inspires you about Job? How does his life challenge you?

Prayers: Pray for the mothers of our congregation as we celebrate their lives and gifts to us this Sunday. Please pray for the many guests and visitors that are coming to our church these days. May the Lord help us to be warm and welcoming. Pray for the National Day of Prayer (May 6th), that God would work in this land to glorify himself.