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Pentecost 5

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Fear and Faith”

Text: Mark 4:35-41 (2 Corinthians 5:14-21)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus said to them, “*Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?*”

Guilty as charged. The disciples in that boat on the Sea of Galilee, and you and me today.

For the truth is that seldom a day goes by when we are *not* afraid. Of *something*. Like the disciples in the boat that day, often we are afraid of the powerful forces of nature. But much more as well. We fear other people – what will they think of me, what will they do to me; will they like me, will they love me? We fear the future – what lies in store for me one, five, ten years down the road? We fear life without our loved ones, and we fear the sin, disease, or death that will take them from us, or us from them.

Fear gives us ulcers and headaches. It keeps us awake at night. It robs us of enjoying life, and what we have and have been given, and those around us. And worse yet, *all the fear and worrying doesn't change a thing!* Or as Jesus said: “*And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?*” (Mt 6:27)

Pastors fear too. Kyle, get used to it. You will fear for your people and fear *with* your people; we fear for our churches, our families, ourselves.

And to be very blunt about it, it is (as Jesus said!) a faith problem.

For **faith** is holding onto the promises of God in Christ Jesus. It is trusting in Him as our security and knowing that everything is in His control. **Fear**, on the other hand, comes when we find ourselves grasping for security. When things seem random and so out of control. When we have nothing to hold onto, or when what we *are* holding onto fails us. Or (to be very blunt again!), when our false gods fail us. For whatever I am holding onto – or *trying* to hold onto! – if it is not the promises of God in Christ Jesus, it is a false god. And we have many. Family, friends, money, medicine, our own abilities and popularity – just to name a few. *What* is it for you? *Who* is it for you?

And so there are two solutions to this faith problem of ours: either take away that which is causing us to be afraid, or take away our false gods, that we cling in faith to *Christ* and Him alone.

We usually opt for and ask for and prefer *the first*. Don't we? We pray for God to solve our problems, to take away that which threatens us, to undo the mistakes that we've made. To give us bright, sunny days, with cool, relaxing breezes, so that we might have smooth sailing through life. That's what *we* prefer . . . but our Lord usually prefers *the latter*. And so He allows the storms and troubles to come into our lives. He allows us to despair. He allows us to fear. Not because He is a God who likes to make His children unhappy and suffer, quite the opposite! He is a Father who wants us to be happy and secure **in Him**. And so He must teach us and strengthen us. That we might repent. That we might learn to cry out to Him for help. That we might learn to pray. *That in the midst of the storms, we would find in Him One who is mightier than the storms, and to put our faith in Him.*

And so it was that day on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples cried out to Jesus for help, which is just as it should have been. With such prayers God is well pleased. And you will not cry out less the greater your faith! . . . You know, that's what the devil wants you to think! You see how sneaky He is? He wants you to believe that the greater your faith, the less you'll have to cry out to God for help. But do you see? The less you cry out to God, the more faith you're putting in yourself, or having faith in your faith, and then you stop crying out to God because you think "that's not what faith does!" . . . The devil knows what he's doing, doesn't he? But don't fall into that trap! For actually (once again!) the truth is the very opposite – the greater your faith, the more you will find yourself crying out to your God and Father an Saviour. But crying out not in fear, but in confidence, in reliance, in hope.

And so that we might learn to pray, to call out to Him who is our hope and strength, and learn to rely and trust in Him alone, the storms must come. Or as the popular saying goes: *there are no atheists in foxholes*. That's actually a pretty good saying, once we realize that the war is not only "out there," but here. That we are in this war, and that Satan is gunning for you. And if you're not in the foxhole of your Saviour, hiding in Him, you are exposed. For we read of Jesus, "***Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.***" (Mt 8:20) Or in other words, Jesus left His home to have no home, to be exposed to the battle for us, that in Him we would be safe and secure.

And so to provide peace for us, to rebuke the fear and trembling in our minds and souls,

to speak the ***“Peace! Be still”*** of His forgiveness and love, the Son of God came down and stepped into our boat. He stepped into the “boat” of our human nature to be with us in the midst of the battle – as a baby, in the wilderness, on the battlefield of life, and finally on the cross. To take the full frontal assault of Satan against us, to render powerless his weapons of sin, death, and hell, and win the war for us. And that is what happened in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Our sin was atoned for, death was defeated, and the gates of hell torn down. It is as St. Paul wrote: ***“In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself.”*** Reconciling – making peace, establishing peace, that we not fear, but put our trust in Him and hide in Him.

But Paul wrote more there. For yes, ***“In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself”*** – but He has also now ***“entrusted to us the message of reconciliation.”*** This message of peace. Or in other words, whereas the Son of God once stepped into the “boat” of our human nature to be with us, He is still with us in that same flesh and blood, *only now in the boat of the Church*. For here this message of peace is proclaimed. Here we are baptized into Christ and hide in Him. Here His own body and blood feeds us and gives us life, as we eat the fruit of the new tree of life. Here we receive the forgiveness that we so desperately need, and with that forgiveness, peace for guilty consciences. And with that peace, strength. And with that strength, confidence and hope. That in Christ Jesus, we have nothing to fear. There is no sin too great to be forgiven, no enemy stronger, no problem greater, no force too powerful. The future is in His hands, and in His hands our future is secure.

And so here, we cry out to our Saviour. We cry out *together*, just as the disciples. In fear, yes, for in this life our faith will never be perfect. But not only in fear, but also in confidence. And with such prayers God is well pleased.

You know, sometimes we ridicule or think less of people who don’t come to church, but who come running to the church when something wrong or bad happens. But don’t we really do it too? So when you see that happening – in others or in yourself – thank God for the storms, the struggle, that our Father loves us enough not to pamper us or spoil us, but do what is necessary to bring us to Him, to His life, to the salvation that is found only in Him.

And Kyle, what a privilege you now will have. For while all of us, all Christians, have the privilege and opportunity of telling others about our Saviour and His love and forgiveness and peace, you will now do this as His called and ordained servant. Put there in that little town in Northwest Indiana to speak His Word of peace, to give His gifts of peace, and to help His people through the storms of life. And though it will give you fear, and no little amount of pain and struggle – we still have the greatest job in the world!

Giving the gifts of God that our Saviour Jesus Christ died to give the world.

You will need those gifts too. And you'll receive them not only from brother pastors, but from your people, as I can attest! When they speak an encouraging Word of faith to you, when they forgive you for your shortcomings and failures, and just when you are low and discouraged, when they thank you for all that you've done for them. And you will think, "*I didn't do anything!*" And you'll be right! That's the point! And that's when we learn, that even in the midst of all the storms, there's no better place to be than in that boat with your Saviour. And with your flock. Crying out together *Kyrie eleison* – Lord, have mercy, *and receiving that mercy*, and much, much more.

So come rest in Him now as He feeds you with Himself, giving you the forgiveness you need, the life that you crave, and the faith that you lack. Come rest in Him now as He feeds you with Himself, that you trust in Him alone. Come rest in Him now, until that day when we no longer live by faith, but are gathered together as one heavenly flock. When the storms will finally cease, and we rest, forever safe and secure, in the arms of our Saviour. In His Name: the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.