

SERMON: 24 JUNE 2018 – Rev Alistair Cowper

“FAITH YOUR FEARS”

(1 Samuel 17:32-49, Mark 4:35-41)

Faith your fears sounds a bit like a sermon title written by a preacher with a lisp. But what might we mean by *faithing* our fear? How can we transform fear into faith. Well, lets think a little about that today.

I was struck first of all by that exclamation by the disciples in the boat with Jesus, when they cried out in the midst of the storm, “Teacher, don’t you care that we’re going to drown?”

If you think about it, what a thing to say to God. Don’t you care? But such a question is quite common among people. Maybe we’ve even thought it ourselves at times. Doesn’t God care? If God cared, why do people suffer? Why do babies die young? Why do people get dementia? Why do people kill each other in the name of their god? If God cared, these things wouldn’t happen.

But they do. And God does care.

On the lake of Galilee, Jesus got up from his sleep and said, with authority, those words, “silence, be still”, and “suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm”.

He then puts the question to the disciples, “why were you afraid? Do you still have no faith?” That seems a harsh thing to say. I imagine that nowadays, people who are employed as life coaches, don’t say these sorts of things. Its not politically correct. It sounds a bit critical. But it was true nonetheless. The disciples were afraid and it was because they hadn’t yet developed the trust in God that Jesus had. They couldn’t yet be left on their own, they weren’t yet old enough or big enough in faith to cope with the storms of life in the way that Jesus had begun to show them. They still had some growing up to do, some maturing.

They hadn’t yet grasped who God was. Their idea of God wasn’t properly developed. They hadn’t yet seen that Jesus was equipping them to get on

with living, by absolute trust in God, and without an unhealthy dependence on another human being to do it all for them. They hadn't yet grasped who God was. And we can see that when we hear them ask each other, "Who is this man?". "Even the wind and waves obey him!".

Who is this man? They may well have spent three years with him, but they still didn't know him. I wonder if there is something in that for us. Will we ever truly know God? Will we only ever have a vague image of who God is?

(Discuss)

On the positive side, God wants us to know him. Jesus later said to his disciples, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father, and promises to send the Holy Spirit to teach them everything and to assure them of the living presence of God within them.

He tells them, "When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you". That verse alone tells us that God wants us to know him, and even live in him. If we are *in* Christ the Son, then we are *in* God the Father.

Why then should we be afraid? If we continue to fear, it most likely means that faith is not yet fully formed in us. It probably means that there is still some of the old self still to die. We've probably still to let go of old patterns of behaviour, old ways of coping, old ways of living, before we can make room for resurrection, new life, Jesus' life in us, Christ in us, the Holy Spirit in us.

If we are still fearful of death, is it because we can't believe in life beyond death? Is it because we don't want to leave loved ones behind and can't let them go into God's care? Are we still frightened of what others will think of us if they find out the truth about us? Are we fearful of getting old, or unwell, or not being able to cope?

If any fear lingers, then we need to remember that fear comes to us all, in one way or another. But also, we need to know that God, in Christ, comes to overcome our fear. He comes today, with a fresh revelation of who God is.

Give up trying to control your fear. Stop striving with that. Let Jesus handle it. As part of life's necessary cycle of loss and renewal, death and resurrection. And when we let Jesus handle it, we might just be awestruck and cry out, "who is this man? I never knew God was like that".

Don't be afraid. Fear is not who you are. Faith is your true vocation. Jesus has come to bring a great calm into your life, even in the midst of the most violent of storms.

So why don't we close our eyes, open our hands and say, "thank you Jesus, you are the great calm in every storm, take my fear and turn it into faith, that the world will see your glory. In this way, might I faith my fears, as I let you transform my fear into faith. Then use me, Lord, a new creation, to transform others, in the coming of your kingdom".