

PRAISE INTERNATIONAL
GHOST OR GOD?
MATTHEW 14:22-33

Good Morning

Prayer Needs - Jack Morris Ordination Service next week

I have a daughter who in the right mood loves be that person who stands in a dark closet and wait to give me a 'boo'. I mean if she is home and I am getting ready for bed its gotten to the point that I have to slowly step out of the bathroom - step back and turn the light on in my closet postured to deal with a person who wants to scare the liver out of me. Now I have never been the Dad who did this kind of thing but last month I did hide in the pantry while she was in the bathroom and sure enough like any young adult she headed for the pantry and I said 'hi' to which she physically shuttered and shrieked...to which I said 'sorry babe but you earned that one'. I mean I suppose I understand the humor involved in watching the involuntary bodily reaction of your Dad. But there have been a couple times that with her and one of my older boys it just rattled my body...it can cut to the core of all rationale...no matter who we are we all have this fight or flight response to perceived danger.

Now what I am talking about here are in truth expressions of affection - but the truth be told we all have things that can startle us...to our core. We have all had places of trauma that can leave land mines of fear that in some cases even direct and hold our life in pain and brokenness. Oh man you scared the snot out of me...that is exactly what Jesus disciples felt in our text today. Jesus sends them away on a boat to be alone but it is not long before they are feeling very alone. First the winds picked up but soon the gravity of their situation begins to crash upon these experienced fisherman. The longer the night stretched - the more they began to live from those deep seated emotions. Had they just seen Jesus heal the sick, feed thousands...yes. Whats on their minds and what are they feeling in their bodies as this night goes on. Its clearly seen as Jesus approaches them on the water...they are terrified!

On seeing Jesus with their eyes their mouth express's what has a hold of them - not settled peace - what their mind, body and emotions perceived in the wind and waves was 'certain' - doom, destruction and death....a Ghost – a lot written about 'ghosts' spirits in their midst...find it in the OT.

- **Now for a first century Jew - this means impending doom.**

Their eyes see Jesus but its telling them a story...not of their care and safety but of doom!

- The trauma of their actual real personal story combined with the wind and waves tells them with '*certainty*' what is happening.
- Its driven by pain and fueled now in fear - this is surely our destruction.
- That may be Jesus but not the Jesus they just left on the shore who *restores and makes whole*.

Their fear and trauma keeps them from locating Jesus IN their peril.

- Jesus IN the storm?
- Jesus IN the darkness?
- Jesus IN the uncertainty?

They are verbalizing how their fear is telling their story...

- I see someone looks like Jesus but can't be Him
- ***If I see anything its a Ghost can't be God.***

And the secret is simply this Christ in you!
Yes, Christ in you bringing with Him the hope of all the glorious things to come.
Col 1:27b JB Phillips

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We see something in the disciples experience that is profoundly true for ALL of us!

- **Our fears are not very good at telling us the truth about our life.**
- Startled - shaken - wait you are not here to harm me - you are my daughter that I love and you love me...

God in Christ tells a story to tell to His friends that night, that is so much more than just walking on water - He has invaded the realm of uncertainty, fear and destruction to tell another story. *You are not alone* - storm, darkness, uncertainty are not a hindrance or barrier in fact they are exactly where He comes to meet His disciples and us;

Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid.

The very elements that threatened to destroy the disciples became the environment in which they recognize Jesus as the Son of God.

Jesus revealing Heaven where and in what they concluded was hell. What they perceived as certain death they now recognize as new life, hope and salvation and that beloved is good news.

Oh the stories that we tell ourselves - some openly some not so openly especially the ones bound to our shame, guilt and in-securities. And this beloved is exactly where we need to surrender and allow the Gospel to tell us the truest story about ourselves.

- We are loved, forgiven, safe and cared for by the God who came into our story who embraced all that lies behind our deepest fears to proclaim Shalom - peace nothing broken, nothing lacking.

You see the disciples are not the only ones who struggle with stories anchored in fear directing our lives.

- We could go on and on talking about how fear becomes a controller and story teller.
- The debates of the day are so often rooted in a story of fear that keep us from the very place we are invited to live in and from Love.

Interesting the many times I have heard this text taught primarily from the context of 'lack' and our need to have 'more' faith. Yet it was Jesus who said your real need of faith is not about quantity - a mustard seed will do but about surrender.

After Jesus identifies Himself - and speaks to the bad story teller fear - *do not be afraid.*

- Peter speaks what everyone is feeling - 'if' - if it is you, truth Jesus the jury is still out - I am still not sure of what story to surrender to God or Ghost.
- So here is what I want to say about Peter walking on the water - this exchange was not about what he accomplished in his faith.
- **It was about locating and recognizing Jesus and the story He was telling them.**
- I am here, fear does not need to rule you - you are not alone, you are cared for.

Verse 33 Matthew records the rest of the disciples reaction with this conclusion - NASV - "*You are certainly God's Son!*"

- Now that is a fascinating verse - I mean is Matthew recording that Jesus passed the God litmus test? I mean weren't they pretty sure this was God's son at His baptism when the sky opened.
- So my point is that this was not some point where these guys suddenly had '**certainty**' about their convictions (remember later they all walk away).

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Beloved the Good News of the Gospel was never about us having ‘certainty’ that we will never doubt or struggle with fear in the future.

- The Gospel is Good News that invites us to anchor our hearts not in certainty about facts but in the revelation of God and His love!
- Wait this God comes in the midst of storm and uncertainty to bring peace and assurance - YES.

It was Fyodor Dostoyevsky who rightly concluded that the conquest of faith is NOT about force and I will add certainty **but by the revelation of divine love.** *Loving humility is a force that is the strongest of all things, there is nothing else like it’.*

- What Dostoyevsky is proclaiming is that God is always about telling another story beloved!

In the face of fear - *Take courage it is I, do not be afraid.*

Our invitation like the disciples is an invitation to abandon our hearts, minds and bodies to the new story...

- **In the midst of storms, fears there is a story of good news that is greater than all my fears...**

Ghost or God...so what does all this mean? Here are a few thoughts from our text:

1. Jesus does not come to us from outside our storms and fears like some divine search and rescue mission.

- **Yet that’s often where we look for him,** outside the circumstances of our lives. How often are we persuaded that the solution to dire circumstances needs to come from outside the circumstances themselves. That is the exact opposite of what today’s gospel tells us.
- Jesus came to the disciples walking on the water, through the wind, and in the darkness. Jesus’ peace, words of comfort, and presence are not outside the storm but in the eye of the storm. So what if we look for him in that place, in the place of our fear?
- If Jesus is not in our storms and fears then he is not Emmanuel. He is not God-with-us.

The wind and the waves are about more than the weather conditions. They are more descriptive of what is happening within the disciples than what is happening around them.

2. Its normally right inside of us and our own ghost story

- The real miracle in this story is that Jesus walks on the storms that brew and rage within us. That means divine power and presence have and always will trample on, overcome, and conquer human fear. It means that Jesus is Emmanuel.
- He is with us in the direst of circumstances. But like the disciples we have trouble seeing clearly.
- **“It’s a ghost,”** it’s the only thing that made sense. People don’t walk on water. It had to be a ghost. What else could it be?
- That is the power of fear to deceive, distort, and drown.

3. Sozo - is a mystery not a religious math problem

It makes no sense to think that the very elements that threaten our lives are the same elements from which new life comes.

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- But isn't that the way of the cross?
- Isn't that the story of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection?
- This is the Gospel we proclaim!

Yes I still find myself slowly walking out of doors or around corners...to look for my daughter. Its normally just playful but there have been a couple times that I have been the one so startled that I shuttered and shrieked - now to her credit she will quickly say sorry and put her arms around me to reassure my old shaken body.

- Startled - shaken – I have to tell my body the story we know to be true...
- *You are not here to harm me* - you are my daughter that I love and you love me...
- Oh Dad I'm sorry..what started in fear ends in assurance and affection.

Our storms and fears are the place in where we first feel and hear our ghost story ...'abandoned by God and alone'.

God in Christ tells a story to tell to His friends that night and to us, that is so much more than just walking on water - He has invaded the realm of uncertainty, fear and destruction to tell another story. *You are not alone* - storm, darkness, uncertainty are not a hindrance or barrier in fact they are exactly where He comes to meet His disciples and us;

Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid.

The very elements that threatened to destroy the disciples became the environment in which they recognize Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus revealing Heaven where and in what they concluded was hell. What they perceived as certain death they now recognize as new life, hope and salvation and that beloved is good news.

Closing Prayer and Communion

Through the storms of life, O God,
you are with your people
in the person of Jesus your Son.
Calm our fears and strengthen our faith
that we may never doubt his presence among us
but proclaim that he is your Son,
risen from the dead,
living for ever and ever. Amen.

And the secret is simply this Christ in you!
Yes, Christ in you bringing with Him the hope of all the glorious things to come.
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