



“Do Not Be Enormously Afraid”

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February 4, 2018

Scripture:

Mark 4:35-41 (a translation by David Bentley Hart)

And on that day, when evening had come, Jesus says to them, “let us cross over to the far shore” and dismissing the crowd they take him, as he was in the boat, and other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves broke into the boats, so that now the boat was filling. And he was sleeping on the pillow in the stern. And they rouse him and say to him “teacher, does it not matter to you that we are perishing?” And being woken, he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “be silent, quell yourself!” And the wind fell and a great calm came about. And he said to them, “why are you so afraid? How is it you do not have faith?” And they were afraid, enormously afraid, and said to one another, “who then is this man, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

Sermon:

Why not be afraid, awed, dumbstruck?

The elements of sea and sky are the most terrifying, wild and free as they cover the earth. We are only just beginning to understand how the great ocean of the world creates our weather, cools or warms our planet, absorbs carbon, makes life possible through a thousand life forms. Water covers 70% of the earth.

If you could be with someone who spoke to the storm, the water and the wild wind, and stilled it, you really ought to be afraid.

In Psalm 29, the whole hymn of praise is also a poem to the power of God as witnessed in storm, sea and earthquake.

This lovely blue green planet that is our home is also wild, and dangerous. Ask any fisherman who ploughs the sea. Ask any farmer who plows the wide-open prairie of North America. Sea and storm keep us humble.

So, why does Jesus demand that we have more faith? Will we be able to still the storm if we have greater faith? Will we be able to stretch out our hands and quiet the elements?

I have never heard of a single saint of God doing so.

But just maybe it's not the storm out there so much as the storm inside that can be quelled? Maybe once that inner chaos is stilled, then the possibility exists to be fearlessly powerful like Jesus.

I have experienced, and I have heard the stories, of the lives of men and women whose faith changed the world around them. Overcoming and "quelling" their sense of fear at their mortality, they did mighty things. They traveled the globe, they crossed seas and mountains and they built schools and hospitals and orphanages, they fed the hungry, healed the sick, created astounding art and beauty, music and song for the world to know God through their labors.

Westminster, for almost 140 years you have been creating beauty, you have been seeking to feed the hungry and help the poor, heal the sick, create beauty. Every human task has been an admixture of goodness and shortsightedness, of great bravery and some level of selfishness, too.

The effort to become an Open and Affirming congregation was an act of love and of bravery. O certainly, we came late to the task, but we humbled ourselves enough to say that it was an overdue responsibility that we had to accept.

Being friendly, kind and welcoming, sounds well and good, but to be Open and Affirming means that our welcome is also an act of defiance to the religious culture of cruel exclusion to the LGBTQ people of our community. Becoming an Open and Affirming congregation

meant that we were more than friendly; we would stand and fight for the full inclusion of all people, ALL PEOPLE, into the house of God, into the community of the faithful; the questioning, the curious and the explorers of faith. And the wounded and the frightened, the angry and the cynical. We would stand with love, and support all who enter here, all who live in our city, all humans, loved by God as God's children.

Becoming Open and Affirming means we step out of our socially comfortable worlds and into humble exploration. It means we step into difficult conversations with one another and with scripture. We became Open and Affirming and we became fighters for justice on a broader scale. How we fought and worked for Marriage Equality!

We became an Open and Affirming congregation by a vote of 97-7. And we did not lose a single member through that vote. We stayed together in service and care, in mission and vision to speak up for our city, serve our city.

Yes, it occurred 10 years ago on this date.

But to be Open and Affirming means to be actively loving and welcoming now, supporting and befriending all who enter here, now. The immigrant and the refugee, the well and the ill, the young and old and the in-between. With skin dark or light. With a culture and story much like my own, or with a story that will be new.

We are not done!

We can never be done!

This translation tells us the disciples were "enormously afraid" of Jesus. I think I know why. They had to follow him, and listen and learn from him, before they could overcome their fear of what Jesus was demanding of them. They had to *learn* to be like him, *practice* his fabulous welcome and joy, *practice* his boldness, his absolute trust in God, and God's design and intention for life and creation.

We must,, too. As an Open and Affirming congregation, we must in every moment overcome our fear, and not be enormously afraid to welcome in more, to be changed by new experience, to sit in humble listening to the life story that is entirely new to me or to you.

We must repeatedly fight to overcome our timidity to stand against voices of hate and exclusion, even as they yell outside our doors, or threaten in our mail, or scream in City Hall.

I believe this is what it means to be Open and Affirming.

And Westminster, there is one more thing that we need to do: As an Open and Affirming congregation...

Let's remember that Jesus also loved to eat with others, Jesus loved a party!

We need to eat together. Laugh together. Have potluck together. Let the kids run and play, together. Eat chocolate, drink wine, share favorite recipes! Sing!

We need to linger over the stories we tell each other of the way our week went, or the day we met our true love, or the video of our favorite pet, place, person!

Jesus spent a lot of time eating and drinking, his enemies despised him for his table community.

But as we eat and drink together, tell each other our lives, share our joys...well I believe that is, yet more, of how we live into our Open and Affirming.

And our Open and Affirming is not a political stance, it is our faithful stance of living in the model of Jesus.

So, dear people, let us continue!

Amen. Alleluia!