

“What do you fear?” Mark 4:35-41

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

When you read Mark’s account about Jesus ministry, you can see how Mark provides so many fine eyewitness details. It is not surprising, as we know that Mark has recorded eyewitness testimonies of the apostle Peter, and that Mark himself was present in many events. For example, the young man who ran away naked, when soldiers came to arrest Jesus, was Mark himself.

The way that Mark described the event with the storm also gives us many insights in what was going on and what were Jesus disciples struggling with. Today we’ll try to do three things.

First, we’ll try to understand what was going on in this event, as Mark described it. *Second*, we’ll see what Mark tells about Christ. What he tries to emphasize. And *third*, we’ll talk a little bit about fear and faith in our lives. About this event, about Christ, and about fear and faith.

First, what was really going on? Mark is quite abrupt in his account. You know that first three gospel accounts, Matthew, Mark and Luke are rather similar. They provide their unique emphasis, their unique details, but they are complementary one to another.

We can learn that before Jesus got into the boat, He had had a hard day. There were crowds surrounding Him all the time. They all wanted something from Him. Mostly – healing. This is what Jesus had been doing – healing everyone who was brought to Him.

In between He was teaching. Trying to explain to the crowds and to His disciples what the Kingdom of God is like. How would you feel at the end of such a day? Dead tired. Right.

This is exactly how Jesus felt. He could only say to His disciples. ‘Let’s get away from here. Let’s go over the sea of Galilee.’ His disciples took Jesus in their boat, as Mark put it, ‘just as He was.’

Just as He was. Exhausted and dead tired. He felt asleep right away. Mark also mentions that there were other boats. Sure, if you have found someone who can heal every disease, you won't let him go until he has helped you as well.

Then it begun. The storm. In the sea of Galilee storms can come very quickly and are quite severe. "And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion."

How tired must Jesus be, to be able to sleep when the waves were breaking into boat and water was filling it. Jesus' disciples tried to do their best, probably they were trying to get water out of the boat, keeping the boat straight against the wind at the same time. But Jesus, He was just sleeping...

"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Their question make sense. Sure, they were looking for some kind of help. Get up, help to draw water out of the boat. If there was one thing the disciples didn't expect that was this one.

Jesus "awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Literary what He said was "Shut up!" "And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." How do you feel when you are awoken from deep sleep? Because of some minor issue. You are upset and angry, right?

In this case the minor issue happen to be – the storm. "Shut up!" And there was a great calm. "And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

We definitely can relate to what the disciples experienced. It must have been such a shock for them. Just try to imagine yourself being in that situation. Who is this guy? How can this be that even the sea and the wind obey him?

Things like this do not happen. Everyone knows this. The disciples knew it. Those in other boats knew it. We know it. This is why disciples were in such great fear. Who then is this? This was the most natural reaction seeing such incredible demonstration of power. They didn't know what to think.

Jesus said to them: "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" Or we could put it in different words. Why don't you still trust me? After all that you have seen with your own eyes. Why don't you still trust me?

You see, what the disciples saw with their eyes was just a man. Like one of us. How can you trust that He is something more? How can you trust that He is what He claims to be – God. The Son of the Living God. True man and true God.

We can see how even closest of Jesus disciples were struggling to believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be. Mark is so honest in his account. He describes how even the apostles initially failed to comprehend who Jesus truly was.

If you sometimes struggle to put together in your mind that the man Jesus, is at the same time eternal God, through whom everything was created and by whom everything is still held together, know that you are not alone.

Our minds are too small. Hundreds and thousands of eyewitnesses saw Jesus exercising His divine power and control over everything in creation, even over death. How many did believe Him?

Jewish government knew about Him – ‘what should we do, for this man does so many signs?’ They chose to crucify Him. Seeing miracles doesn’t create faith in Jesus. Your faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

God who has called you, He gives it to you. He offers and gives it to anyone who does not reject it. But your faith is and remains a gift of God. The most precious gift that one can ever receive.

Here we come to our second question for today. What was Mark trying to tell us, as his readers. What did he try to emphasize? Step by step Mark describes how the disciples witnessed what Jesus did. Healing, teaching, casting out unclean spirits.

Now, rebuking the storm. In the Old Testament this is one of the attributes of the Creator, that He has authority over seas. He commands them and they obey. It is interesting that Jesus used the same word: “Shut up!” rebuking demonic forces and the storm. “Shut up!” And they both obeyed.

There is a story about a pious ruler, King Canute of England. Supposedly he had his throne set up by the seashore as the tide was coming in for the very purpose of demonstrating his powerlessness over the sea.

Seated on his seaside throne, he ordered the tide not to invade his territory or to wet his garments. When the sea failed to obey his command, he said, “Let all the earth know that the power of kings is vain and frivolous...

... nor is any king worthy of the name except Him by whose command heaven, earth, and sea obey eternal laws.” King Canute then placed his crown on the head of an image of Christ on the cross.

It is so true. Whatever illusions of control human beings might have, such illusions disappear rapidly in the face of violent storms - typhoons, hurricanes, tornados. We are reminded that we are creatures, and not creators. It is someone else who truly is in control, not us.

This is Mark's point. He reveals to his readers, what was still hidden from Jesus disciples – that Jesus Christ, true man is, indeed, also true God. Commanding destructive forces of nature, defeating even death. He is the One to whom all authority is given in heaven and on earth.

Now our final question. Fear and faith. Or better – fear and trust. This is something we all experience. They are a part of our lives. The disciples were afraid for their lives.

As we often are. What is your greatest fear? Losing your loved ones? Your health? Your life? Being betrayed by someone you trust? Broken relationships and broken heart? Not matching the standards that society imposes?

Being misunderstood and rejected, by those whom you love and try to care for? Being hated, ridiculed and called names by the world because of your trust in Christ? Losing job? Losing your business? Not achieving your goals?

Poverty? Failing in your responsibilities as spouse, parent? Fear about the future of your children? The world is becoming stranger and stranger a place. More broken. More aggressive. More divided. More foolish.

We may have different fears. Because we are not in control. Sure, we can do a lot, but ultimately we are not in control. From time to time I have many of these fears which I just mentioned, and you have yours. The disciples were afraid for their lives. But then ... “Shut up!” Jesus solved their issues with two words. “Shut up!”

Almighty God is present in our lives gently. Daily providing for His little, rebellious human creatures. Giving us life, light, warmth, loved ones, everything that we need for our living. It is easy to pretend He is not here.

He has created you for a certain life. For a good life. For life in freedom, in joy, in peace, filled with His wisdom, meaning and security. He didn't not create you for a life in fear, but for life lived in trust in Him.

However so many choose to reject God's generous offer. They choose to put their trust not in the Creator, but something in creation. Be it our own wisdom and abilities, or money and possession, or friends, or connections, or something else.

God calls all these other things - idols. They are good, but when we put our trust in them, they become idols. Thus people could pretend that they are masters of their own destinies. The price is – life in fears, serving their idols, hoping they will help.

Jesus asked His disciples. “Don't you still trust me? Don't you trust I'll do everything for you? Don't you know that you don't need to fear anything if you are with me?” At that moment they still didn't trust Him.

It took more. It took Jesus death and resurrection to reveal that He really is in control over everything. Even over life and death. That the resurrection and the life to come in God's presence are real.

Once the disciples had seen the risen Jesus, it changed everything. They were not afraid anymore. They trusted in God, who had revealed Himself in so strange a way – as the man Jesus. Who had revealed His love in so unusual manner – giving up His life so that you could live.

This is why the apostles went out with their message. This is why we have received the words of God. So that you could know for sure, that there is only one thing to fear is this world – *not trusting* one true God, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

This is the only thing one needs to fear. If you don't trust Him, then, of course, you will have your fears. For you are not in control. You will have to trust idols. It is that simple.

But if you trust in Christ, the Son of the living God, the same One who revealed His divinity before thousands of eyewitnesses, you don't need to fear anything or anyone. He is in control over everything.

He has promised to be with you all the time. Until you finally see Him face to face as He is. This is what we need to remember about fear and trust. In God's presence there is no fear. There is nothing to fear for God's children. If you are baptized, if you are a member of Jesus family, fear not, trust your Father is Heaven.

Walk through your life with joy, serve your neighbours with all that you have as much as you can, be generous, learn, rejoice, celebrate, pray for your enemies, share God's wisdom with those around you, forgive to those who neither deserve nor desire your forgiveness, be at peace. Enjoy your life!

For you are free. Free to live in trust to your God. Amen.