

In the name of the great I AM,
who calms the storm and and strengthens our hearts.
Amen

Some of you know that I lived aboard a sailboat
for nearly eight years in my twenties.
There's no question that I identify with the disciples here.
Having lived and sailed along the east coast,
there were plenty of opportunities for catastrophe,
disaster, calamity, upheaval.
I can still vividly recall with great fear and anxiety,
some of the harrowing experiences
that threatened to swamp my vessel,
and send me to a watery demise.

But you don't have to call yourself a 'live-aboard'
in order to experience the chaos symbolized by oceans.

This story of "Jesus stills the storm" is found
in the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

At first glance, it might seem to be an observation of Jesus' divine power over chaos and creation. But a clue that it invites us to look closer is the question that Jesus poses to his disciples, to us.

I highly recommend this wonderful, modestly-sized book entitled *The Questions of Jesus – Challenging Ourselves to Discover Life's Great Answers*, written by John Dear, 2004.

In the preface by another favorite author, Franciscan Monk and Theologian Richard Rohr, he writes, "I am told that Jesus only directly answers *3 of the 183* questions that he himself asked in the 4 gospels!" Rohr notes that "this is totally surprising to people who have grown up assuming that the very job description of religion is to give people answers and to resolve people's dilemmas."

Well, that's a relief to me – letting me off the hook! But seriously, you may have noticed Jesus' tendency to pose a question in response to being asked a question.

What might His purpose be, to ask all those questions?
Rohr suggests that “as John Dear brilliantly illustrates
...Jesus’ questions are to reposition you,
make you own your unconscious biases,
break you out of your dualistic mind[set],
challenge your image of God or the world,
or present new creative possibilities.”

If that is true,
then certainly Jesus’ method of inquiry is effective on me!

In today’s episode of disciple adventures,
upon his commanding the wind and waves to obey,
Jesus rather sharply asks his crew, “Why are you afraid?
Have you still no faith?”
Clearly by his calm demeanor, asleep in the stern,
he had not been alarmed.
Me? If I’d were in that boat,
I’d have been thinking, “time to do something!”
I’d have been in action mode.

Of course, my time in the Coast Guard
would have equipped me to respond as well,
“Semper Paratus” – “Always Ready!”

Luke’s Jesus simply asks, “Where is your faith?”
Brunner’s interpretation of Matthew puts it harshly,
“Why are you such cowards? Littlefaiths!” (Mt. 8:26)
Brunner explains “Faith is often depicted in the Gospels
as a courageous confidence
that Jesus is equal to the occasion.” (p. 399)
And there’s my theological variation on Newton’s 2nd law,
whereby I envisaged Jesus in last week’s sermon as Jesus,
the stronger, Strong man.

While contemplating Jesus’ question which is basically,
“Why are you afraid, where is your faith?”
I was led to other related questions he asks:
On the meaning of life – “Can any of you by worrying,
add a single moment to your life span?
If even the smallest things are beyond your control,
why are you anxious about the rest?” (Mt. 6:27; Lk 12:26)

On faith –

O you of little faith, why did you doubt? (Mt. 14:31)

Why are you terrified? (Mk. 4:40; Mt. 8:26)

When the Son of Humanity comes,
will he find faith on earth? (Lk. 18:8)

Why this commotion and weeping? (Mk. 5:39)

If we reflect back over the last year,
we might agree that *we* (todo el mundo),
have faced perhaps greater storms that we're accustomed
to riding out in our personal and corporate vessels.
As we are wading our way out of the Covid-19 pandemic,
Many are turning an eye towards venturing out again.
And we might be peering across the metaphorical sea,
towards the distant, opposite shore.

Surprisingly, I learned that when Jesus directed his
disciples to head 'over there', it wasn't to escape the
crowds, although that might have been a factor.

He was taking them with him directly into potentially hostile territory, enemy territory according to some. Maybe there was some truth to his calling them cowards. Maybe there was a very real and valid basis for their fear.

So let's talk about fear.

Fear is part and parcel of living.

There's small fears and big fears.

Personal fears and communal fears.

Jesus does not negate or dismiss fear.

What he does try to get through to us,
those who've laid claim to him as our redeemer,
is that he's in the boat WITH us,
ready to help us in our weakness;
challenging us to stay on course
through the turbulent waters and continue
on God's mission of love, mercy, and compassion.

Remember those final moments, before
Jesus would be betrayed and crucified to save the world;
His parting words were, “Do not be afraid.”
Thomas Merton wrote that,
“fear lies behind all our personal problems
and every crisis in the world” and it is the “root of war.”
Henri Nouwen said that “fear is the opposite of love.”
It is because we’re afraid that we lash out, strike back.

(Dear, p. 150-151)

If we look to Jesus, remembering that he is with us,
doesn’t it help us to take a deep breath and calm down,
before acting in a way that harms self or others?
It isn’t that we’re not supposed to respond to situations,
but how we respond with Jesus as the captain of our vessel.
It makes me wonder if it isn’t Jesus who’s asleep, but us.

The hymn Trust and Obey comes to mind.



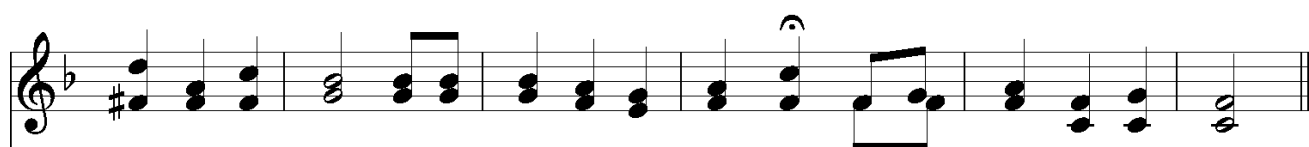
1. When we walk with the Lord In the light of His word, What a glo - ry He
 2. Not a shad-ow can rise, Not a cloud in the skies, But His smile quick-ly
 3. Not a bur-den we bear, Not a sor-row we share, But our toil He doth
 4. But we nev - er can prove The de - lights of His love Un - til all on the
 5. When in fel - low-ship sweet We will sit at His feet, Or we'll walk by His



1. sheds on our way! While we do His good will, He a - bides with us still,
 2. drives it a - way; Not a doubt nor a fear, Not a sigh nor a tear,
 3. rich - ly re - pay; Not a grief nor a loss, Not a frown nor a cross,
 4. al - tar we lay; For the fav - or He shows, And the joy He be - stows,
 5. side in the way; What He says we will do, Where He sends we will go,—



1. And with all who will trust and o - bey.
 2. Can a - bide while we trust and o - bey.
 3. But is blest if we trust and o - bey. Trust and o - bey, for there's
 4. Are for them who will trust and o - bey.
 5. Nev - er fear, on - ly trust and o - bey.



no oth - er way To be hap - py in Je - sus, But to trust and o - bey.



The last verse of that hymn reiterates that fear has no grip on us if we cling to Jesus, trust and obey Him.

Maybe when the disciples continue to be awe-filled, gasping, “who is this then, that even the wind and the waves obey him?”

It is a push for us to recognize the peace, that Jesus issues to the wind and the waves, is peace for us as well, through all the storms large and small, if we but trust and obey.

And courage? I think we’ll find it through Jesus.

He is standing watch with us as we head to that distant shore, whatever it may be.

In the end, the ultimate fear or enemy as we see it is death.

And as we leave the shore we know,

what do we leave behind,

what do we intentionally let go of?

Do we set aside ideologies, politics, possessions for the sake of the one who loves us unconditionally, as we are?

Speck of faith or tinier?

Are we able to completely surrender
our hearts and lives to God?

When Christ returns, will his dream be recognized?
Does he have his own fear to contend with as he asks,
“When the Son of humanity comes,
will he find faith on earth?” (Lk 18:8)

Or is it as the Psalmist tells us, that there is no place
where God is not present, North, South, East, West.
God in Christ has the healing for precisely whatever
malady we fear; and it is Christ that “puts us upon the sure
foundation of His Loving Kindness.” (Collect for today)

It is Jesus who comes to us, walking on water
after feeding 5 thousand hungry mouths,
Who tells his disciples, Be courageous; I AM;
do not be afraid.”

Then he got into the boat with them,
and the wind died down. (Mk 6:45-52)

Peace, be still. Amen

Amma Susan+

