



“What Are We Afraid Of?”

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Sermons at Central Park United Methodist Church

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Fearlessness isn't possible for the average human being. We're just not wired that way; in the face of mortal danger we will react. Fight or flight: our brains are awash in chemicals, and science teaches us that when confronted with an immediate threat our instincts will quickly overwhelm our ability for rational thought, and we will either flee the situation or fight like heck to overcome it.

In June of 2016, two brothers were playing outside their Colorado home when a mountain lion emerged from out of nowhere and grabbed one of the boys. Upon hearing the child's screams their mother ran from the house and saw her son pinned under the 110 pound cat; fight, or flight? This woman ran towards the pair and realized that the tyke's whole head was inside the big cat's mouth, and somehow she managed to pry the animal's jaws

open and rescue her son from certain death. “Law enforcement officers responding to a 911 call found and killed a mountain lion in the family's front yard,” the police report said. The boy and his mother were taken to an Aspen hospital with non life-threatening injuries, according to the Aspen Times.

Fight or flight? Our “go to” biological composition is to stay alive, and fear can help us do just that. A little fear is a healthy thing; that’s why Fairy Tales were invented. That’s why as children we’re warned about all the things that might do us harm: look both ways before crossing the street; be home before dark; buckle your seatbelt; don’t talk to strangers. Fear is a part of who we are as human beings- it’s how, in part, we’ve managed to stay alive through thousands of years of human evolution.

When faced with an hellacious storm at sea, the Disciples were afraid. That’s not news; it’s how most of us, quite frankly, would feel. Nature is a powerful force; more powerful than we human beings like to admit. Now would be a good time to remind you that it’s been 276 days since Hurricane Maria first struck the Island of Puerto Rico, and the Daily News reports that as of June 1, 95 percent of Puerto Rico's power-making capacity has been restored. According to PBS News Hour, “four months after Hurricane Maria, about 450,000 of 1.5 million electricity customers in Puerto Rico still have no service.” We vastly underestimate nature’s capacity to rage.

We lack humility in the face of our planet, thinking it well within our rights to debase and destroy this beautiful planet that God lovingly, perfectly birthed into being. Every so often the natural world rises up and reminds us that we are not as smart as we think we are. “Keep building your luxury seaside homes on

the shoreline where ocean levels continue to rise,” nature taunts, “and watch what happens.” The sea is as beautiful as it is treacherous.

The Disciples knew the dangers of the sea. They were, after all, experienced fishermen. The sea was where they made their living. Yet they chose to embark on their journey across it at the end of the day. Night was falling, and their most precious cargo—Jesus—was asleep on board. “God made the night for the refreshment of our minds and bodies” (UMH 878) and Jesus had been teaching and interacting with the crowds all day long. He was tired, and took his rest. The Disciples were left to take charge of the trip. Yet when the storm arose, these experienced seafarers were bereft, unable to manage their vessel. It was taking on water; it was sinking, and fast. What could they do? Fight or flight? Where could they flee? There were no life jackets to keep them afloat; no dinghy to which they could cling; no “May Day!” signal to transmit; no Coast Guard cutter would appear in the dangerous waters to rescue them. They had no viable options left to them.

It was only then—in their desperation and despair—that they turned to Jesus. And he rescued them. Against all odds. In the midst of tribulation. When they were about to hit rock bottom. The fox hole prayer. The “Hail Mary” pass. The day we reach the end of our rope, and we—at last!—relinquish control over *everything* and give ourselves over to Christ; submitting our whole selves to his love and care. “Perfect submission, all is at rest. I in my Savior am happy, and blessed. Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine.” (*Blessed Assurance* by Fanny J. Crosby, 1873)

You don't need to wait until you're at your bitter end in order to give yourself over to the love and care of our Lord. You don't have to hit "rock bottom;" you don't need to be brought low by your own powerlessness in the face of adversity in order to draw close to the perfect love that Christ holds for you. You need not suffer; you need not hurt; you need only accept the love and salvation he offers you. He is nearby; wherever your journey takes you, Jesus is already there. Waiting, watching, showering you with grace upon grace as you labor and fight and live your life. You need never live it alone, as long as you have him.

For some of you this is a reminder; for others, an invitation. Wherever you are on your faith journey, you are invited into deeper relationship with a Savior who rescues the perishing, heals the afflicted, and forgives every sinner.

This is the good news! This is the best news! He who was dead is indeed alive forevermore, and He is Lord of life, of heaven and of earth. He is not far from you even now; even for the worst offender, he is waiting, watching. "See, on the portals, he's waiting and watching, watching for you and for me. Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling, calling, O sinner, come home." (*Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling* by Will L. Thompson, 1880)

Let us pray:

Come, my Light, and illumine my darkness.

Come, my Life, and revive me from death.

Come, my Physician, and heal my wounds.

*Come, Flame of Divine Love, and burn up the thorns of my sins,
kindling my heart with the flame of thy love.*

Come, my King, sit upon the throne of my heart and reign there.

For thou alone art my King and my Lord. Amen.

~Dimitri of Rostov, Russia, 17th Century