

“May the words from my lips and the meditations of our hearts always be pleasing to you O God”

Fear - that is what the Gospel story for today is all about! This is one of 2 stories of Jesus stilling a storm in the Gospel of Mark. For the ancients weather epitomized divine control over nature and human thriving.

Today's Gospel is also about the contrast between Jesus - who can sleep through the terrifying storm that is causing the small and fragile craft to sink and the disciples who are paralysed by their fear. Commentators say it is a difference in faith. The disciples are lacking and Jesus is not.

The storm, the boat, the disciples and Jesus. But this story is about a bit more. Its about us as well. The storm is like the storms of our lives - our fears - our worries that overwhelm us sometimes. The boat is us - very fragile when things get tough.

I would like to ask you to take a moment or two to think about when you felt fearful, When you felt fear. A time in your life when you felt fear that paralyzed you. Fear that was far more than a knot in your stomach - much more like a punch to the gut. Fear that made it difficult to think straight - or perhaps impossible to think at all?

Take a moment and try to think of a time where you felt fear like this. Try to feel how you felt - try to feel again what that fear felt like.

## PAUSE

Was your fear for your health or safety or perhaps for someone you love? Was your fear for your financial stability or for food security? Was your fear about change? Was your fear about loss? Was your fear about death - your own or someone you love?

There are many many fears we fragile humans feel. There are fears that are personal to us. There are fears that perhaps we cannot even name aloud because they are so terrifying. There are fears that haunt our days and especially our nights.

And then there are the fears that are outside of us. The fears that we experience corporately. The fears we have for our neighbourhoods, our Country - our community and our fears for our world.

The world is full of fearsome things. Our fears are real.

When I first came to Advent in December of 2017 there was real fear that perhaps the congregation was not viable, would not survive. It was part of the call process - an analysis of our strengths and weaknesses. And it was part of my joining you - I was given a 2 year call - instead of the customary 3 because of fears of not having enough money to keep going.

The fears and the worries had been around so long that they seemed to permeate alot of things and to be weighing people down.

Being new and from outside I saw things a bit differently. I saw a place of abundance. A congregation that was not only viable - but a place to treasure. And so I preached a lot about abundance and how I experienced the love of God and love of neighbour here. And I preached about the abundance of community - the importance the people of Advent put on worship and their care for one another.

We are now at 15 months of living through a pandemic. When COVID first hit like the storm the disciples experienced, our boat felt awfully fragile. Again we feared that maybe we would not survive as a congregation. We feared for our personal health and safety and we feared for the health and safety of those we know and love. And maybe some of those fears have eased and maybe they have not. But we are still standing. We are still worshipping, living out our mission to love God and neighbour. To share the good news of Christ - to share the word of God's grace. We are still doing what we are called to do - and we are still doing it here.

COVID has showed us that we are viable and resilient.

And COVID may have challenged our synod and our national Church. But it has also been a time of great collaboration, we are working together - we are learning from one another.

Martin Luther said that the Church should always be reforming - and perhaps COVID gave us a shove to do just that. Maybe we were complacent - or maybe our fears for the future, if there

would even be one ! -Maybe those fears were holding us back from doing what God wants us to do.

FEAR - this is what our story from Mark's Gospel is all about. We have thought about our fears and we have named our fears. Once named - once spoken aloud they lose some of their power over us.

Our reading of the story of the stilling of the storm shows us that chaos and fear are real in our lives - but the story also proclaims that God is not absent in the storm - but very very much present.

Jesus calmed the disciples and the waves and the wind with his presence. Jesus said "Peace - be still"...and all was calm.

Fearsome things are very real. But they do not have the last word. Jesus' word of peace replaces the fear. Jesus could very well be described as a non anxious leader! Jesus' word of peace can still the storms in our hearts and minds.

Jesus' words of peace - the presence of the Holy Spirit - the love God has for each of us - these help to calm the storms of our lives. And it is helpful to remember that "Do not be afraid" are the first and last words of the Gospel. God is with us.

AMEN