

BASINGSTOKE AND READING CIRCUIT SERVICE

Sunday 13th June 2021 - 'Responding to Fear with Faith'

Welcome

A very warm welcome to worship this morning. Whether you are worshipping at home on your own, or are sharing a screen with others, know that we are all gathered together in the presence of God.

This morning, in our second week of Bible month we will be looking at two passages from Mark's Gospel which explore how we respond in faith to challenging or frightening situations.

(If you wish to explore the whole section that has been allocated for week two of Bible month it is Chapter 3 verse 7 to Chapter 6 verse 6 – Jesus' ministry in Galilee to his rejection by his own people.)

Gathering Prayer

Loving God, we have come to worship you.
Help us to remember that you are here with us.
May we pray to you in faith,
sing your praise with gratitude,
and listen to your word with eagerness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, **Amen.**

(Methodist Worship Book)

First Hymn: (StF 628) Faithful One, so unchanging

[Faithful One - Brian Doerksen \[with lyrics\] - YouTube](#)

Faithful One, so unchanging,
Ageless One, you're my rock of peace.
Lord of all I depend on you,
I call out to you again and again.
I call out to you again and again.
You are my rock in times of trouble.
You lift me up when I fall down.
All through the storm your love is the anchor,
my hope is in you alone.

(Brian Doerksen b. 1965)

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Holy God, to you alone belong glory, honour, and praise.
We join with the hosts of heaven as we worship.
You alone are worthy of adoration from every mouth,
and every tongue shall sing your praise.
You create the earth by your power;
you save the human race in your mercy, and renew it through your grace.

To you, loving God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be all glory, honour and praise
now and for ever. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sins to God.

Silence

For our foolishness and our thoughtless use of the gifts of your creation,
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

For our neglect of you, and our failure to care for others,
Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

For our selfishness in prayer and our carelessness in worship,
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Silence

Here is good news for all who put their trust in Christ.
Jesus says: 'Your sins are forgiven.'

Amen. Thanks be to God.

(Methodist Worship Book)

The Lord's Prayer

Let's join together in saying The Lord's Prayer, in whichever version feels most familiar to you.

First Reading: Mark 4: 35-41 'Jesus calms the storm' (New Living Translation)

⁵ As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." ³⁶ So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). ³⁷ But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water.

³⁸ Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?"

³⁹ When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ Then he asked them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

⁴¹ The disciples were absolutely terrified. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "Even the wind and waves obey him!"

Second Hymn (StF 250) Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult

[Songs of Praise - Jesus Calls Us O'er the Tumult - YouTube](#)

1. Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult
of our life's wild restless sea,
day by day his voice is sounding,
saying: 'Christian follow me.'
2. As of old apostles heard it
by the Galilean lake,
turned from home and toil and kindred,
leaving all for his dear sake
3. Jesus calls us from the worship
of the vain world's golden store,
from each idol that would keep us,
saying: 'Christian, love me more.'

4. In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
still he calls, in cares and pleasures:
'Christian, love me more than these.'

5. Jesus calls us! By your mercies,
Saviour, may we hear your call,
give our hearts to your obedience,
serve and love you best of all.
(Cecil Frances Alexander 1818-1895)

Second Reading: Mark 5: 21-43 'Jesus heals in response to faith' (New Living Translation)

²¹ Jesus got into the boat again and went back to the other side of the lake, where a large crowd gathered around him on the shore. ²² Then a leader of the local synagogue, whose name was Jairus, arrived. When he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet, ²³ pleading fervently with him. "My little daughter is dying," he said. "Please come and lay your hands on her; heal her so she can live."

²⁴ Jesus went with him, and all the people followed, crowding around him. ²⁵ A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding. ²⁶ She had suffered a great deal from many doctors, and over the years she had spent everything she had to pay them, but she had gotten no better. In fact, she had gotten worse. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus, so she came up behind him through the crowd and touched his robe. ²⁸ For she thought to herself, "If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed." ²⁹ Immediately the bleeding stopped, and she could feel in her body that she had been healed of her terrible condition.

³⁰ Jesus realized at once that healing power had gone out from him, so he turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my robe?"

³¹ His disciples said to him, "Look at this crowd pressing around you. How can you ask, 'Who touched me?'"

³² But he kept on looking around to see who had done it. ³³ Then the frightened woman, trembling at the realization of what had happened to her, came and fell to her knees in front of him and told him what she had done. ³⁴ And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over."

³⁵ While he was still speaking to her, messengers arrived from the home of Jairus, the leader of the synagogue. They told him, "Your daughter is dead. There's no use troubling the Teacher now."

³⁶ But Jesus overheard^[a] them and said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid. Just have faith."

³⁷ Then Jesus stopped the crowd and wouldn't let anyone go with him except Peter, James, and John (the brother of James). ³⁸ When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw much commotion and weeping and wailing. ³⁹ He went inside and asked, "Why all this commotion and weeping? The child isn't dead; she's only asleep."

⁴⁰ The crowd laughed at him. But he made them all leave, and he took the girl's father and mother and his three disciples into the room where the girl was lying. ⁴¹ Holding her hand, he said to her, "*Talitha koum*," which means "Little girl, get up!" ⁴² And the girl, who was twelve years old, immediately stood up and walked around! They were overwhelmed and totally amazed. ⁴³ Jesus

gave them strict orders not to tell anyone what had happened, and then he told them to give her something to eat.

SERMON

Many years ago, I learned to sail, and I was very proud when I gained my Royal Yachting Association Level 2 National Dinghy Certificate, before rising to the dizzy heights of Competent Crew. Now as a dinghy sailor, all I had to do was keep my boat upright and avoid bumping into anyone else, but as Competent Crew I had added responsibilities – trimming the sails, shouting out things like ‘ready about!’ and ‘lee ho!’ and making tea in the galley.

Being a member of the crew is very different to sailing on your own. It means that you’re part of a team, and in order to stay safe, everyone in that team needs to trust each other and have faith in each other, from the least experienced sailor to the saltiest sea-dog. Everyone has to pull their weight, and so perhaps, as they headed out across the sea of Galilee, the disciples were a little surprised when Jesus fell asleep in the boat.

Now, I don’t suppose that the disciples had any Royal Yachting Association qualifications, but they were seasoned fishermen who had spent much of their lives fishing on this huge lake. They would certainly have been a competent crew, far more experienced than Jesus the carpenter. They must have been familiar with the strange squally weather conditions and the unexpected and violent storms that blew up frequently and suddenly on the sea of Galilee. But as the winds howled and the waves swamped the boat, threatening to sink it, it was Jesus who they turned to, shaking him awake and shouting at him, ‘Teacher, don’t you care that we’re going to drown?’

Where was their faith?

We don’t know for sure who was in the boat, but if Simon, Andrew, James and John, the first disciples were there, they had already witnessed Jesus performing miracles. Jesus had healed Simon’s mother-in-law, a paralyzed man, and many others in the area. How on earth could they have thought that Jesus would let them drown? The disciples wanted Jesus to ‘do’ something, whereas all he wanted, was for them to trust him. Jesus’s presence with them was all they needed to survive.

In the two passages that we’ve read or heard this morning, there is a stark contrast between how the disciples responded to their fear, and how Jairus and the woman with the bleeding responded. Jesus has a response for each of them.

To the disciples, he says: ‘Why are you afraid, do you still have no faith?’

To the woman, he says: ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well.’

And to Jairus, he says: ‘Don’t be afraid, just have faith.’

Let’s have a closer look at chapter 5. Here, Mark uses a typical ‘Markan sandwich,’ where he takes two stories and puts one inside the other, a bit like the sandwich filling. Here, he starts with the story of Jairus and his daughter, but at the critical moment, he switches to the story of the woman who is bleeding. Here again, we see some stark contrasts. Jairus and the woman are at opposite ends of the economic and social spectrum, polar opposites if you like.

Jairus is male, a leader of the synagogue, so he is a man of distinction and a man of means. Unusually for Mark’s Gospel, he is one of the few characters that is named. Jairus can approach Jesus openly with his request.

In contrast, the woman is nameless. She’s destitute, having spent all her money seeking medical treatment. She’s considered to be ritually unclean and shunned by the community. She has to fight her way through the crowd to approach Jesus, and even then, it has to be done surreptitiously.

But they do have some things in common. They have both heard about Jesus, they both desire some sort of healing and they are both prepared to take risks. But, most importantly, they are both equal before Jesus.

So, what's going on in Mark's sandwich? We start with the story about Jairus. After Jesus had calmed the storm, they had eventually made it to the other side of the lake to a region called the Gerasenes, where Jesus healed the demon-possessed man. Jesus and the disciples returned once again across the lake, where a large crowd awaited them and gathered around them.

Jairus approaches Jesus and falls at his feet, begging him to come and heal his daughter who is dying. Now, remember that Jairus was a synagogue leader, and many synagogue leaders had close ties to the pharisees, who were pretty upset about the things that Jesus was doing. Jairus disregards the possibility of political danger and puts all his faith in Jesus.

And so, they all head off towards Jairus's home. And it's at this point that Mark interrupts the story, keeping us in suspense, as he changes the focus to the woman with the bleeding. She had been suffering for twelve years and had spent all she had on treatments, to no avail. But, she'd heard about Jesus, and in desperation, she fought her way through the crowds, thinking to herself, 'He doesn't even need to touch me. If I can just touch the edge of his robe, I'll be healed.'

What faith!

Clinging to that thought, the woman struggled and pushed her way through the crowd, and as soon as she got close enough, she crouched down and reached out as far as she could. For just a moment her fingers found the hem of Jesus' robe, and for that split second, she was literally, hanging by a thread.

In the same moment that the bleeding stops, Jesus feels the power leave his body and he turns to the crowd, asking who touched his robe. The trembling, frightened woman, kneels before Jesus and explains what she has done. Jesus calls attention to the woman, not to embarrass her but to show her his compassion. He doesn't want her to slip away anonymous and unnoticed. Jesus makes sure that the woman leaves, knowing that he has not only healed her, but that she is loved and that she has worth. He leaves her with the words: 'Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over.'

But, back to Jairus. One can only imagine what he must have been thinking? *'Come on Jesus, I asked you first, and my daughter is dying. Why are you wasting time with this woman?'* He must have been frantic. And then comes the news that he was dreading, the news that his daughter has died, and Jairus is advised not to trouble Jesus any further. But when Jesus hears what they are saying he turns to Jairus and says: 'Don't be afraid. Just have faith.' Jairus had shown faith by approaching Jesus in the first place, and Jesus encourages him to keep on believing.

The stories of Jairus and the woman show us that faith is something that we must cling to in the midst of hopelessness. The disciples in the boat, Jairus, and the woman with the bleeding, were, in their different situations driven by a sense of desperation. They responded with fear, but Jairus and the woman turned that fear into faith.

So, what can we learn from these passages?

First of all, faith opens the door to the power of God. Our faith might be bold and brave, or it might be imperfect, halting and laced with fear. But what is most important, what counts, in order for our faith to be effective, is that it is directed to Jesus and to God.

Secondly, these passages teach us that faith demonstrates persistence in overcoming obstacles. The bleeding woman overcame her shame and embarrassment. She overcame her fear of contaminating Jesus.

Jairus persisted, even though the crowds of people told him not to bother Jesus any further, and he took no notice when they laughed when Jesus said the girl was not dead but asleep.

And thirdly, these passages teach us that faith is embodied in action. Jairus and the woman didn't know that Jesus was the Messiah, they were probably unclear about who he was at all. And yet, they held on to their faith, and the belief that he had the power to heal. They were willing to take risks and to put their faith to the test.

With Christ in our lives, we can pray and trust and move ahead, and when a squall approaches, we need to lean into the wind and put our faith in God.

The good news that's proclaimed in this section of Mark's Gospel is that when we are in the presence of Jesus, the storms subside, the demons beat a retreat and death loses its hold. Not every illness will be healed, not every disaster averted, but faith is able to hold on in the face of death, knowing that God has conquered death in the resurrection of Christ.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray for the Church and for the world, and let us thank God for his goodness.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, you promised through your Son Jesus Christ to hear us when we pray in faith.

We pray for the life of the Church around the world, and this morning from our Methodist Prayer Handbook we pray for churches, ministers and congregations in Cuba, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. We pray for national church leaders, that you will grant them wisdom and prayerfulness. We pray for all who are a part of the Basingstoke and Reading Circuit, for unity, love and fellowship, and we pray for our local ecumenical relations and initiatives.

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for the needs of the world. We pray for countries such as Brazil and India who are still trying to cope with climbing numbers of Covid 19 and lack of resources. We pray for justice and equality in the distribution of vaccines. We pray for all countries affected by war and pray for those trying to negotiate peace, that they might have patience and courage.

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for the wellbeing of our community and for businesses trying to re-open and return to normal. We pray for those in our community who have lost their businesses during lockdown and for those who have lost jobs. We pray for our local schools and ask that you will keep the staff and children safe. We pray for our young people, that they can catch up on the learning they have lost over the last year. We pray for our local Foodbanks and for the families that they support.

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for those who we know are in special need. For those who are ill and in need of healing. We pray for those who have been bereaved and for those who are lonely, depressed or suicidal. We pray that they might find good listeners. We pray for the homeless, for those in prisons and remand centres, that they might receive humane treatment and hope. Lord, comfort and heal all those who suffer in body, mind or spirit. Give them courage and hope in their troubles and bring them the joy of your salvation.

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

And Lord, we pray for ourselves, that we will face our challenges and our fears with faith.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Final hymn: (StF 645) Will your anchor hold in the storms of life?

[Will your anchor hold in the storms of life - YouTube](#)

1. Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
when the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
will your anchor drift or firm remain?

*We have an anchor that keeps the soul
steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!*

2. Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear,
when the breakers roar and the reef is near?
While the surges rave, and the wild winds blow,
shall the angry waves then your barque o'erflow?
3. Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,
when the waters cold chill your latest breath?
On the rising tide you can never fail,
while your anchor holds within the veil:
4. Will your eyes behold through the morning light
the city of gold and the harbour bright?
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore,
when life's storms are past for evermore?

(Priscilla Jane Owens 1829-1907)

Blessing

Have no fear, whoever you are, wherever you go,
the Lord is your strength.
Go into God's world in the assurance of his presence,
the knowledge of his goodness,
and the certainty of his love. **Amen.**