**Sermon by Haydon Wilcox**

Sunday 20.06.2021

A preacher dies, and when he gets to Heaven, he sees a New York cab driver who has more stars in his crown.

He says to an angel, "I don't get it. I devoted my whole life to my congregation. Why did the taxi driver get more stars than me?"

The angel says, "We reward results. Did your congregation always pay attention when you gave a sermon?"

The preacher says, "Once in a while someone fell asleep."

The angel says, "Right. Well, when people rode in this guy's taxi, they not only stayed awake, but they usually prayed!"

Every time I read the story of Jesus calming the storm, whilst he and his disciples were out in a boat on the sea of Galilee, I am reminded of the time that I experienced a similar storm on this lake.

I and a party of pilgrims ventured out on a lovely afternoon onto the Sea of Galilee and within 30 mins the weather changed. Winds from the north arose, the sky darkened, it lashed down with rain, the boat was rocking backwards and forwards, and forked lightening appeared to hit the water. Our act of worship on the boat suddenly came to an abrupt conclusion, as we moved from a peacefully reflective time singing ‘Dear Lord and Father of mankind’ to what was a chilly, wet, and rather frightening experience.

It was then that I realised how powerfully real this biblical story was and how experienced fishermen must have felt threatened. Jesus would have nodded off to sleep prior to the development of that sudden storm, having no idea what was happening until his friends awakened him.

The surprise in the story is that Jesus isn’t afraid, yet these experienced fishermen are! The response of Jesus is ‘Have you no faith?’

They are more concerned about the incredible way the storm ceases and the waves calm, the moment he woke up and spoke, “Peace! Be Still.’ Jesus though is bemused by their lack of faith.

Faith – what is it? Well, it’s not about being a follower of a religion and its certainly not being religious.

It isn’t about the concepts we think about God or the rules of living we commit to. It’s not a crutch or a form of life insurance. Faith appears to be about a total trust in another – the ultimate other – God. Just like a young child trusts their parents, so Jesus portrays a total trust in his heavenly father. Such a purity of trust apparently eliminates fear. Jesus just doesn’t fear.

What people would pay for a remedy to eliminate fear! In our society so many people struggle with anxiety. Fear is all around us – a fear of catching Covid, a fear of making a mistake, a fear of being found out, a fear of losing one’s job, a fear of being unable to pay our bills, a fear of being rejected, a fear of being unattractive, a fear of failing, a fear of developing dementia or cancer, a fear of death.

The human civilisation is riddled with fear yet it’s part of what makes us human. On the one hand fear can protect us from danger or inappropriate behaviour but often fear and anxiety shapes our quality of living and diminishes our vision for the future. Fear drives out hope, creates wars, bring out the worse, it wrecks the present, and saps the joy of life.

If we proclaimed a solution to fear and a resolution to build a world where fear could be banished, surely our churches would be filled, and the kingdom of God would be established! Certainly, some would make a lot from this and of course they do, for there are many who today traffic the solution to escape fear – don’t the users of drugs, alcohol, porn, and gambling all find a temporary release from fear and yet in the process become more fearful.

When Paul spoke to the Church in Corinth, he told them that he and his Christian friends had endured afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, and hunger. He witnessed that all these things that would have evoked fear, they willingly endured for something greater. They demonstrated purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness, love, truthfulness, and the power of God but faith reigned supreme.

Paul challenges the people of Corinth to make the decision of faith now - to trust now. To make a commitment to Jesus now.

I placed my trust in Jesus, when I became a Christian at 17, yet I still have fears. Does that mean I lack faith? Of course, I doubt. Of course, I wish I was like some of those inspirational Christians I’ve met, to be bolder and have more conviction. What I’ve learnt is that as well as an event or turning point when we come to faith, I also know faith is a process, and that through the years I have learnt to do and say things that I could never have imagined I’d do. I’ve learnt to invite God in, and I’ve experienced God’s movement in my life and within creation. So, I think that coming to faith as Paul encouraged the people of Corinth to make, is so important but it’s also about being open to God’s grace building and shaping us throughout the years.

So, I urge anyone listening today or later reading this address, who hasn’t made a commitment to trust in Jesus, to find out how they can do this. Don’t delay this wonderful opportunity to find faith and for your life to be transformed. God has been waiting all your life, up until now, for you to believe in Him and to follow Jesus.

I really do want to work for a world where fear is less, and hope is greater. I’m sure like me you want to be an agent of hope in the lives of those who fear. And that’s our belief that by bringing others to trust in Jesus, to have faith in him, their fears may subside. They may start the process of losing their fear and finding hope. Hope for building a better world where people experience less fear and desire to want to improve this world.

And when I face my death, having added my bit to building God’s kingdom here on earth and knowing that to follow him was the best choice I’d made at 17 years of age, my hope is that I will not be fearful. I hope that I can remember that storm on the sea of Galilee and rather than shaking Jesus to wake him up, that I might snuggle next to him in the stern of the boat and feel totally safe in him and know that being so close I have nothing to fear because I trust that he will keep me safe.

For even death is an event but it’s also a process and the hope is that in heaven there will be no more fear, only joy and the opportunity to trust God more and more.

A fellow was stuck on his rooftop in a flood. He was praying to God for help.

Soon a man in a rowboat came by and the fellow shouted to the man on the roof, "Jump in, I can save you."

The stranded fellow shouted back, "No, it's OK, I'm praying to God and he is going to save me."

So the rowboat went on.

Then a motorboat came by. "The fellow in the motorboat shouted, "Jump in, I can save you."

To this the stranded man said, "No thanks, I'm praying to God and he is going to save me. I have faith."

So the motorboat went on.

Then a helicopter came by and the pilot shouted down, "Grab this rope and I will lift you to safety."

To this the stranded man again replied, "No thanks, I'm praying to God and he is going to save me. I have faith."

So the helicopter reluctantly flew away.

Soon the water rose above the rooftop and the man drowned. He went to Heaven. He finally got his chance to discuss this whole situation with God, at which point he exclaimed, "I had faith in you but you didn't save me, you let me drown. I don't understand why!"

To this God replied, "I sent you a rowboat and a motorboat and a helicopter, what more did you expect?"