

## FREEDOM FROM FEAR OF NATURE

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Series: Trails to Freedom  
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Forgiven, Lent, COVID-19  
Matthew 8:23-27

Today marks the beginning of the 3rd week of lent. This is 6 weeks that lead up to easter. A time for slowing down, to reflect on the gift of Jesus' life death and resurrection, and repentance. A season where through the help of the Holy Spirit we change how we think about the things of God and return back to him. A season where we remind ourselves of our need for God.

As a community of faith, we have been doing this by looking at the things Jesus revealed as he led his life towards the cross. We will celebrate the freedom given to us at the cross at Easter. We became sons and daughters of God. We were adopted into this new family. Yet on this trail leading to our freedom Jesus' life revealed so many things about what was to come. We are looking at his life before the cross and picking out some of those things.

Last week we talked about our freedom from sin. Today we are awoken to a nation in fear and panic as health officials confirm the first COVID-19 case in Kenya. Yesterday one of our staff went to the store to get more soap so that we can have more handwashing stations and she could not buy more than one. Partly because more people and institutions are needing to have more soap and the other part is the panic buying that has started.

I saw a really good meme last week when stores in the US were out of toilet paper and hand sanitizer. Said something like "to the person who bought all 27 hand sanitisers and left none, you do know to be safe you need others to also wash their hands too?"

It just points to how panicked the world is. And you see scripture being posted all over the place people convinced that God is punishing the world or the world. I heard someone ask yesterday, "Why would God send such a thing?" And obviously, there is a group going, "Whoa, have we not been praying? Why is this here despite?" The world is in panic and we cannot ignore it. In fact, we are called not to ignore it. A world in panic needs a bold church.

We today will pick up one more thing Jesus left us on our trail to freedom as he led his life towards the cross. On the other side of our freedom from fear of nature.

Let's pray

So again I invite us into the story of Jesus life. I invite us to read together as there is power in God's word and in reading it together.

*And then Jesus got into a boat, and His disciples followed Him. Out of nowhere, a vicious storm blew over the sea. Waves were lapping up over the boat, threatening to overtake it! Yet Jesus was asleep. Frightened (not to mention confused—how could anyone sleep through this?), the disciples woke Him up.*

*Disciples: Lord, save us! We're going to drown!*

*Jesus: Please! What are you so afraid of, you of little faith?*

*Jesus got up, told the wind and the waves to calm down, and they did. The sea became still and calm once again. The disciples were astonished.*

*Disciples: Who is this? What sort of man is He, that the sea and the winds listen to Him?*

### **Matthew 8:23-27**

If you were following an experienced person and they said they were lost, you know that you are very lost at that point. If you were in a boat with an experienced fisherman and you see them panic over a storm, that is a very bad sign. This is the story unfolding here. These guys were mostly fishermen and they were very good on the sea. But they faced a storm that got them scared.

And there was also a lot of superstition about lakes and the spirits of all those who had died on the lake. Some of you may know another story of Jesus walking on water and these guys completely freaking out. That's because of the superstitions surrounding the spirits of those who had died at sea. So you can imagine everything going on in the minds of the disciples.

This time around there was something else different about the sea. Not only was it unusually stormy, but there was the son of God in it too. There is a talk in our archives where we talked about some things that happen in our walk of faith despite being believers and sometimes especially because we are believers.

These guys had Jesus right in the boat and he was asleep. Sometimes we are in a crisis that makes us feel that God is asleep. For some believers, the panic at this time as we deal with the pandemic feels like God is asleep. Plus, who sleeps in a storm? There is water pouring into the boat, the waves are hitting and people are screaming all around.

I remember one time during advent I was reflecting on how babies sleep in the mother's arms. There could be buildings being brought down but as long as they are in their parent's arms they are at peace and keep sleeping. And I pictured Jesus doing exactly that and preempting this point in the storm. He is the son of God, always held in the father's arms. Storms could rage outside but he has a peace inside him that overcomes the storms outside.

Have you met people in a storm in life and you cannot just understand why on earth they are so peaceful and restful? And for some people this is what drew them to Jesus, they met people in their lives who were in storms that they should never have had peace about. But their knowing Jesus produced a peace inside them that overpowered the storm outside.

They manage to wake him up. You know how your body feels when you are abruptly woken up? And then you wake up and find that it is nothing big. You are grumpy for a while. Jesus, fully human could have felt the same way. He wakes up I picture him in this place, his body has been pulled from sleep abruptly and it is not a great feeling so he says

“Please, what are you afraid of. Have a little faith.”

If you are one of the 12, you are going, “ahh, the storm duh” You are probably wondering, do you not see that we about to die? How dare you ask that? Do you now see what just hit the world?

And Jesus was not belittling their experience, he was not belittling their concern. He was seeing way more in them than they could. He was seeing them as children of God in whom God is well pleased. Pleased enough to give them power over nature as he was just about to demonstrate.

Jesus turns his attention to the wind and the waves. Not out of fear. Not out of a lack of sleep but out of love for his scared friends. He was not going to sleep if they are that scared. He loves them enough to respond to the storm and he speaks over it to calm it.

On his way to the cross, on the trail to our freedom, Jesus showed us that he has power over nature giving us freedom from fear of it.

Yes, this is a broken world. Yes, the environment has been damaged and the changes are sometimes devastating. Yes, swarms of locusts just flew into the country as they followed their nature. Yes, there is yet another pandemic ravaging the world and it just made its official stop in Kenya. And pandemics happen and this is not the first one and might not be the last one. And yes, Jesus has power over nature too and he speaks calms to all storms.

Yet he could only speak peace and calm to the storm because there was a lot more peace inside him coming from his identity as the son of God. Have you realized that a lot of the things you say when you are not at peace inside you don't seem to create more peace usually? Because out of what fills our hearts, we speak.

The church is God's plan to heal this world. There is a lot more going on and now the church has to also heal a world panicking in the storm of a pandemic. Sons and daughters of God will not bring peace and calm if they are in chaos themselves. And our peace can only come from the confidence in being sons and daughters of God in whom we are well pleased.

Some of you lead business and you will have to lead your business through responding to the pandemic. Some of you are such huge voices and influencers on social media and every post you put out there moves people. Some of you are teachers and your vulnerable students are looking up to you in confusion as they hear the news. I am the pastor of this community and I constantly bombarded with messages and thoughts with every news article that comes on the virus spread. Some of you are parents and your families are looking to you to lead.

If we are going to lead our community and speak peace into the storm, we have to work from a place of our identity as sons and daughters of God and a place of total peace ourselves. And then our response is not out of fear for ourselves but out of love for others.

Jesus seemed perfectly okay with sleeping in the storm. If they hadn't woken him up, I wonder if he would've slept all the way. Now, I do not know what would have happened to a few of them. But he was okay sleeping in the storm. His response to the storm was out of love for his very scared friends.

As I lead our teams in responding to caring for our community, I am not doing it from a place of fear for myself. We have not added more hand washing stations out of fear. We are deep cleaning the place, yes that is the smell of bleach some of you noticed when you walked in. It is not out of fear rather out of love for this community and this city. And should we get to a point where the govt and health officials advise that church gatherings stop, our response will not be out of fear but out of love for our community and this city.

As we go to the stores this week don't buy like the world is buying. Do not buy like one who is driven by fear. How could you serve your community at this time in a way that helps heal the city? And that could mean and certainly at this time, less physical contact. It is so counterintuitive in our culture and even for humanity but maybe for this season that could be our gift to our city. It could be washing your hands more than you normally would. Not out of panic but because you are called to love your city. Some of us are in a position to provide hand washing stations around our city. Some of you can buy an extra bar of soap to share with families that may not be able to afford it.

Let out an identity as God's children are our source of peace that moves us to act in love, not fear.

**Communal prayer (adapted from John 14:27)**

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Lord Give us Your peace,  
Your Peace is not like the world's peace  
Lord Give our city and nation Your peace  
Your Peace is not as the world's peace  
Even in this pandemic our hearts will not be troubled  
Your Peace is not like the world's peace  
Even in the panic and storm around us  
Your peace is not like the world's peace  
And with your peace may we heal the world with You  
Your peace is not like the worlds peace  
Amen

Let's pray