

Stepping out of Fear

-- Brad Walston

Franklin Delano Roosevelt -- in his first inaugural address, said this: “... *first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself...*”

Who was he kidding? Look at all these things we have to be afraid of...

Being alone - Getting Sick - Our kids getting sick - Our kids doing Drugs

Losing our Jobs, our income, our homes

War - Death

Fear of Crowds

Fear of Change...

Mental illness - Hospitalization - injury

Fear of ridicule –

Abuse... at home - at work - and at the nursing home...

Snakes, bugs and heights...

And the number one fear of Americans today....? Public Speaking!

I could go on, right? But I think you get my point – we have plenty of things to fear.

...But listen to what FDR says next...

...this is even better -- “... the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.” That’s a mouthful but listen one more time: – *nameless ... unreasoning ... unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.*

In other words, he’s talking about some unidentified fear that freezes us up and makes us stay home when we should get out and get going.

... that unknown thing that keeps us in our chairs when we should be getting up and doing something!

FDR, it seems, knew a little something about fear. Born into an atmosphere of privilege, frequent trips to Europe as a boy made Roosevelt conversant in German and French.

He learned to ride, to shoot, to row, -- he learned to play polo and lawn tennis. He also took up golf and sailing.

As an adult he was very active and loved outdoor activities until, in 1921 at the age of 39, he was diagnosed with paralytic poliomyelitis, Polio...although a more recent study in 2003 favored a diagnosis of Guillain-Barré syndrome. Eleven years later, he defeated Herbert Hoover to become the longest serving president in U.S. history

In his first term as president he faced the Great Depression, instituting his New Deal. In his second term, He also faced Adolph Hitler and WWII and in his third term he saw the Japanese invasion of Pearl Harbor. Yes, I think FDR knew a little something about fear.

By now, if you've been paying attention, you know that I'm a recovering alcoholic and drug addict. I mention it almost every message because it's such a huge part of my story. In fact, I may have mentioned that this past summer I celebrated ten years of sobriety – in a row! But it took me almost 20 years to get these 10 years of continuous sobriety.... Why so long? ... in a word ... fear.

I was paralyzed by the fear that I would have to live without my BFF, my companion and lover, drugs and alcohol. I couldn't imagine life without them.

I would begin to get sober, but then I would start to feel again. I would become overwhelmed by the fear that I might have to change... so I would drink.

I was afraid that I might have to get out of the house. I might have to go do something productive. Maybe not even something productive so much as just... ..something!

Paralyzed by fear, I would procrastinate finding that job or applying to school – whatever might be the next step toward becoming a normal, healthy person.

This time it's different. I have something to focus on instead of the fear. I have the church, and I have service to others. I keep my focus on Jesus.

Peter figured it out ...after he stepped out of the boat and after Jesus helped him get back into the boat.

The Sea of Galilee is a lake – not very big -- 13 miles long and only 7 miles across at its widest point, but the wind can come up suddenly, howling out of the Golan Heights turning the lake into something like a blender – shifting suddenly, first from one direction, then from another direction...

Peter and the disciples knew they were in trouble – those guys had been working that lake for years. And what should have taken an hour at most, turned into an all-night battle. Winds whipped the sails around, waves crashed over the tiny boat. The disciples found themselves, “in the middle of the sea, tossed about by waves.”

It’s a metaphor! “...in the middle of the sea, tossed about by the waves.”

And all we have to do is change a couple of nouns to get a really good description of many of our lives.

- In the middle of my addiction, tossed about by cravings...
- In the middle of debt, tossed about by creditors...
- In the middle of a divorce, tossed about by guilt...
- Fill in your own: In the middle of _____, tossed about by _____.

The disciples fought the storm for about nine hours – nine hours!

In a small wooden boat -- with no motor! – in the dark! – until about 4 a.m. when they saw something none of them expected. In fact it was so unexpected they thought it was a ghost at first. A ghost? Remember that in that area of the world in the first century people had firm belief in the spirit world, demons and ghosts were all around them! They would be less surprised to see some dark lord of the underworld than to see their friend and teacher out there on the wind and the waves!

We don’t expect to see Jesus in the middle of our challenges. Why would we? We expect to see Him in Devotionals .

We expect to see Jesus at Easter – shimmering and radiant – risen from the tomb! – and at Christmas – cute little baby in the warm & fuzzy glow of the stable...

We expect to see Jesus in our hymns and in worship, -- during retreats and praise time and meditations.

Where we don’t expect to see Jesus is in a foreclosure or a layoff. And we don’t expect to see Jesus in a lawsuit or a break-up...or in a war.

I never thought I’d see him in the depths of my addiction.

We don’t expect to see Jesus in the storm. But it is in the storms that He does His best work. Do you know why?

Because it’s during our storms and challenges that Jesus gets our fullest attention.

Jesus response to the disciples' fear is classic Jesus. We should have it inscribed on every wall and over every doorway:

“Take courage; don't be afraid – I am here.”

Those are three very powerful words...”I am here...”

When a child spots a parent or a grandparent in the audience at the game, or the play, or the big recital ... “I am here” changes everything.

To lose your job but to feel the support of your family or friends, “We're here...”

To wake up in the hospital and hear your spouse whisper, “I'm here.”

When I came back to my church after falling off the wagon – more like jumping...”We are here” was the best feeling – like it didn't matter what mistakes I made...

Maybe that's why God says it over and over again in the Bible.... Because He means it.

“You are in me, I am in you,” Jesus says...

And Paul is convinced that, “Nothing can separate us from the love of God.”

When I found God, I discovered He wasn't lost – I was. God had been right there with me the whole time. But if it weren't for my struggle with sobriety, I might never have looked.

If it weren't for the very storm itself, Peter would probably not have gotten out of the boat at all. Max Lucado, in his book, *Fearless*, remarks that if the weather had been fine and the lake smooth, the disciples would probably have clapped and cheered, “Yay, Jesus, You the man!” but nobody would have been motivated to actually step out of the boat. Storms and challenges prompt us to do things we wouldn't normally do.

So... for a few incredible, breath-taking moments.....

Peter... walked... on... water.

Newtonian Physics took a hike – displacement theory – out the window!

Peter defied the laws of nature – he defied gravity!

Peter didn't start to sink until he took his eyes off the Lord, and he turned his attention to the storm. Just for a second, he lost sight of Jesus. Maybe the waves piled up like a mountain between them; maybe the wind cracked the sail behind him like whip. But the fact remains, when Peter shifted his attention away from Jesus and toward the squall, he sank like a brick.

“Give the storm waters more attention than the Storm Walker, and get ready to do the same.”

Unlike some of us, Peter didn't flounder in the rough water for very long. He flailed around for a second and quickly cried out, “Lord, save me!”

And Jesus immediately reached out and caught him by the hand.

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.

Did you catch that? ...After they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Jesus could have calmed the waves hours earlier – nine hours earlier, in fact!

But He didn't... Even when he wasn't teaching Jesus was teaching!

Jesus could have calmed all of our storms long ago. But he hasn't. Why?

Because our challenges teach us invaluable lessons.

And one of those lessons is this: Storms are not an option – fear is.

Jesus is the master and commander of every storm.

So in what storm do you find yourself being tossed around? ... Are you scared?

Then keep your attention on the Lord, and remember his words...”Fear not, I am with you.”

Benediction...

Friends, Jesus calls us to step out onto the water with Him – to leave the safety of our little boats and to walk toward Him in faith and to join Him in the work He is already doing in our world. We remember his words:

“Don’t be afraid. Take courage. I am with you.”

So let’s leave this place filled with faith and confident that the love and presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit go with us - wherever we go. Amen.