

You of Little Faith

Matthew 8:23-27

The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, February 3, 2019

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

It seems obvious to us to fear death.

It seems obvious to us that we should fear when the TV or the radio tells us that a tornado warning has been issued for our area. A tornado warning means that a tornado has been spotted and confirmed. It is here and action must be taken. It seems obvious to be afraid when the tornado is tearing the planks out of your house and throwing them around while you are in the basement covering your head.

It seems obvious to us that we should fear when the house is on fire. When there is smoke in the room and the door is hot, it seems obvious that we should fear. We should fear for ourselves and for the others in the house, although often if we are honest we fear more for ourselves than we do for others even when we love them. It seems obvious therefore that we should keep a fire extinguisher in strategic locations around the house and have smoke detectors installed. In fact it makes so much sense that even our state laws require such things be done in order to protect our lives and the lives of our neighbors.

It seems obvious to us that we should be afraid when the doctor tells us that the disease that we have is incurable. It seems obvious that we should be afraid when he tells us that the disease that we have is terminal. It seems obvious that we should be afraid when he tells us that we should explore hospice care.

It seems obvious that we should be afraid when the weather is bad and we are driving in it. It seems obvious that we should be afraid when the car begins to slide uncontrollably toward the ditch and the temperature outside is below zero. It seems obvious that we should take provisions in the car in case such a thing should happen.

And it seems obvious that in all of these circumstances we should pray. We should pray to the One who can help us. We should pray to the One who manifested His glory. After all if He can command the wind and sea in time of need, He can command whatever it is that threatens our lives in time of need.

It seems obvious, logical, and rational that we should be afraid in such circumstances. And yet the disciples were in those same circumstances and the Lord rebuked them for their little faith. The Lord rebuked them for their cowardice.

The Lord does not tone things down. He does not white wash that which is evil. The Lord does not need to give the benefit of the doubt because the Lord knows all

things. There is no doubt with Him. The Lord is not nice. He is not kind according to human standards. He is righteous and does not have to worry about us throwing His sins in His face if He throws our sins in our face. The Lord is not squeamish. He does not hint around and what He is really trying to say. He just says what He says and that is the end of it. And so the translation gets it wrong. The translation gets it wrong when it translates the word of the Lord to His disciples in the boat, "Why are you afraid?" The Lord did not say that exactly. That would have been too toned down for the Lord. Rather the Lord asked them, "Why are you cowards?"

The Lord is not concerned with the exhibition of their behavior in the boat. The Lord is concerned about the constitution of their persons. And so the Lord does not ask them why they are afraid because that would be a question about a fear that comes and goes. Rather He gets to the heart of the matter. He gets to how they are constituted as people. He gets to their faith. "Why are you cowards?" Do you not realize who it is that you have with you in the boat? You should have by now. He has done sufficient miracles.

And for you the question is the same. In the face of death, why are you cowards? Why is fear in the face of death rational to you? Do you not understand who Jesus is? Do you not yet believe that He rose from the dead? Do you understand what the full scope of the significance of the resurrection of our Lord from the dead is?

The Lord pronounced a curse on us. He told us that we would return to the dust of the earth. He told us that we are dust and to dust we shall return. We did not return to the dust of the earth before we sinned. We returned to the dust of the earth after we sinned. Ever since the Lord declared those words to us the creation has been subject to decay.

Everyone dies. There are no exceptions. People might live a long time and then they die. Even when people do live a long time we never entertain the notion that they might be an exception. Even when people go missing we do not assume that they were like Enoch and they walked with God and so God took them. We assume missing people are dead somewhere, hence the phrase, "Presumed dead."

Death seems so absolute in our lives that we even have jokes about it. We talk about the certainty of death and taxes. Those jokes are not funny unless you presupposed that death is inevitable and then so are taxes. If we really believed that death was not inevitable, we would not laugh at the joke because the joke would not be funny.

And so when the Lord rises from the dead, it means many things, but one of the things that it does mean is that the creation has been reconstituted. It has been made new. Death is no longer an absolute.

This is why I preach to you so often about the authentic humanity of our Lord. This is why I remind you that His humanity is just as genuine as your humanity. You need to know this. You desperately need to know this. You desperately need to know that the Son of the Father is authentically God and authentically human in one person. You need to know this lest you assume that Jesus rose from the dead simply because He was God.

Things look so easy for God. With His almighty power everything seems so simple. And so when our Lord who is God rises from the dead we are tempted to believe that the only reason that He rose from the dead is because He is God. God is spirit. There is no rising from the dead with a spirit. Only a body rises from the dead. And so without the authentic humanity of our Lord there is no rising from the dead, but He is authentically human and so He does rise from the dead.

His authentic humanity means that He is just as human as you are. And this One who is just as human as you are is risen from the dead. Death is no longer the final say on the creation. Decay is no longer sway over the creation. There is One who got away. There is One who rose. That means that people can rise from the dead. That means that there is hope for you after death.

In this way the creation is reconstituted. It may look like it is still subject to decay, but if it were really subject to decay Jesus would still be dead. It may look like death still reigns supreme, but if it did, then Jesus would still be dead. Therefore the creation is no longer subject to decay. Death no longer reigns supreme. And the One who rose from the dead has promised you that He will return again in glory and give the command and raise the dead. He will raise you from the dead. Therefore no matter how or when you die, you will rise at His command. He can do it because death no longer reigns supreme.

But we don't believe all of that. If we did, we would not be cowards in the face of death.

But our Lord is not nice. He does not mince words. He does not tone it down in order to make what He is saying more acceptable to us. He does not tone things down when He accuses us of cowardice. He does not tone things down when He says that we have little faith.

I used to think that the Lord was toning things down when He said that to His disciples. I used to think that what the Lord really meant to say was, "O you of no

faith!" I thought that the only reason that He said to the disciples, "O you of little faith" was because He wanted to make His rebuke a little easier for the disciples to hear. But the Lord does not mince words. He does not mince words when He calls us cowards. He does not mince words when He says that the disciples and therefore also you have little faith.

The disciples may have been cowards, but they knew from whom to seek help. They may have been cowards, but they knew to wake Him up. They may have been cowards and shouted at Him, "We are perishing!" But they also shouted at Him, "Save us." They were cowards to be sure. The Lord's assessment of them stands, but they also are those who are of little faith. They are not those who are of no faith at all. They still know to whom they should pray in face of death, "Save me."

And so do you. You may be afraid of death. And your fear of death reveals that you do not believe that the Lord has reconstituted the entire creation with His resurrection. It may reveal that you do not believe that your death is conquered and that life everlasting is coming. But you must believe something because you are here. You are here at Divine Service crying out to the one who rose from the dead, "Save me!" How many inactive members who have drifted away from God will call the preacher on the day they are diagnosed with the terminal disease and request prayer? You are here. You are here in the face of your coming death. You are here to cry out to the Lord, "Save us. We are perishing."

And the Lord will rebuke you for your cowardice. And He will continue to do so. He will not stop pointing out your faithlessness to you. But He will also answer your prayer. He will save you. He will save you because you are not those who are of no faith. You are of those who are of little faith.

And so the same Lord who gives His voice and the wind and the sea obey Him is the same Lord who will give His voice when He returns again in glory and raises you from death unto everlasting life.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.