

TURNING POINT – INSIDE THE MOMENT BETWEEN FEAR AND COURAGE

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SCRIPTURE – MARK 4:35-40

35 “That evening, Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Let's cross to the east side.’

36 So they left the crowd, and his disciples started across the lake with him in the boat. Some other boats followed along.

37 Suddenly a windstorm struck the lake. Waves started splashing into the boat, and it was about to sink.

38 Jesus was in the back of the boat with his head on a pillow, and he was asleep. His disciples woke him and said, ‘Teacher, don't you care that we're about to drown?’

39 Jesus got up and ordered the wind and the waves to be quiet. The wind stopped, and everything was calm.

40 Jesus asked his disciples, ‘Why were you afraid? Don't you have any faith?’

INTRODUCTION

Let us recall from the conclusion from last week's sermon, General George Patton said, “Courage is fear holding on a minute longer. If you give in to your fears, you are on the path to defeat. If instead you stand strong in spite of your fears, you are on the path to victory. And we must never forget that we are not in the battle alone. With the power of God on our side, we cannot be defeated.”

This week, we look into the “moment” between fear and courage so that we can learn and make informed choices that lead us to faith and trust, as opposed to anxiety and terror.

Before we explore that “moment,” lets re-orientate ourselves.

BODY

Usually there is a build-up to events. Things, although we might understand them to be random, are seldom random. And many times, they are interwoven.

When Rationality Turns Into Irrationality

As the storm intensified, the disciples' rational beliefs made way for irrational beliefs. The disciples quickly went from "we've got this" to "we're going to die!" And all along, their focus was on "we," in other words, on "self."

Instead of rationally asking Jesus to save them, the disciples instead, accused Jesus, "Teacher, don't you care that we're about to drown?" The disciples have lots of evidence that the one in the boat with them at the peak of the storm, is the Creator of the universe but at the same time, their fear of death was real but irrational.

Rationality made way for irrationality because the disciples did not challenge their old belief systems; a system that was effectively "we" focussed and not God focussed. Maybe this is a good example of Billy Graham said, "When we come to the end of ourselves, we come to the beginning of God."

The Turning Point: How to Change Irrational Beliefs to Rational Beliefs

You need to ask yourself a few questions, and the more honest you are with yourself, the more likely you are to turn your irrationality into rationality.

The first question to ask yourself is, what has just happened? What did I observe? What did I do? What did others do? What exactly is stressing me out?

For the disciples, a bad storm struck and it demanded an appropriate response from them. They would have rigged the boat, lowered the sails, took to the oars to keep the boat heading into the waves and started bailing water so the boat would not sink. This was not enough, and the boat began to sink.

What emotions are you feeling? Anger – depression – anxiety – frustration – self-pity and so forth? What is your negative self-talk? What are you holding onto?

The disciples feared the storm, probably knew someone who had drowned and it brought them into needed motion and respect for the storm. Holding onto their familiar coping mechanisms that have worked in the past, they would have rigged the boat, lowered the sails, took to the oars to keep the boat heading into the waves and started bailing water so the boat would not sink. Their worst fear started to realize and the boat began to sink.

So fear progressed to worry. Worry progressed to anxiety. Anxiety progressed to troubled. Troubled progressed to distressed. Distress progressed to terror.

Is your current behaviour according to what you know works for you ... or not?

This is interesting. Although the disciples' initial behaviour is what works for all fishermen in a storm, their initial behaviour reached the point of futility and their emotions spiralled. So, at the end of the day, both their initial and final behaviours – prior to engaging Jesus – were not working.

Now for the hard part, what do you believe about what has just happened? Which of your beliefs are helpful and most likely to improve your situation?

The disciples believed that they were going to drown, all hope is lost. In reaching this point, they had to also believe that there was nothing more they could do for themselves.

Then, shortly afterwards, – that moment between fear and courage – they realized that the Creator of the universe was in the boat with them and if they could get Him to do something, all will be well.

Do you have any evidence that the unhelpful and self-defeating beliefs and conclusions are true and useful? What role does anxiety and terror play here?

The disciples had two beliefs. As we have said, the one is “all hope is lost” and the other is “hope has been found.” Their anxiety and terror, although they recognised that Jesus could help them, lead to the accusation, “don't you care that we're about to drown?” Perhaps they were also asking “do you love us enough to save us?”

Do you have any evidence that your grounded, helpful and useful beliefs and conclusions are true and useful? What role does faith and trust play here?

In terms of faith and trust, the disciples (in Matthew 8:25) referred to Jesus as “Lord” (kurios), meaning they acknowledged His authority and power to do something about their dire situation.

They had lots of evidence; they had seen Jesus heal a lame man, heal a person who could not walk because of crippled legs suddenly get up and toss his crutches aside, heal a man who had never been able to talk, heal a man with leprosy, witnessed Jesus preach the Sermon on the Mount, heal many and at Capernaum, even healed a Centurion's servant.

The disciples were with Him as He went to Peter's home and healed Peter's mother-in-law. They left with Jesus as He headed toward the lakeshore and heard first-hand as He told the parables of the mustard seed, the sower and light under the blanket.

Am you willing to replace your unhelpful and self-defeating beliefs with grounded, helpful and useful beliefs?

The disciples did, unfortunately as their last, not first choice.

What are your new feelings?

The disciples' new feelings are taken together in Mark 4:41, "Now they were more afraid than ever and said to each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!""
They now recognized Jesus God with them. This now speaks of a rational, holy and reverent fear instead of a type of an irrational fear that quickly escalates into terror.

CONCLUSION

A consequence of the irrational belief of the disciples was a loss of trust and faith and in this space it's possible that they may indeed have questioned His love. However, if they were able to dispute their old belief system, the result would have been a rational belief in the saving power and grace of Jesus.

I am reminded of Jesus' response to the disciples, and for that matter to you and I as well when, in a time of crisis, our attention is not on Jesus, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?"

Jesus is real and is a rational solution – to every storm of life.

Now that you know what happens inside the moment between fear and courage, the next logical question is, "Just how long is that space between fear and courage?" It's your call. But my advice is, call really soon!

Amen.