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One of my earliest memories is sitting in what had been the living room of the old Victorian rectory at Holy Comforter Church in Angleton, Texas. It was now a classroom and we were watching the PowerPoint of the day (which was the flannel board) and the story in the today's Gospel was being presented.

They had the all-purpose Jesus figure and on this occasion, rather being stuck on the Mount of Olives or some other place, he was kind of pasted on the stern of a little boat. And there was the flannel big wave and then Francis McDuff—who's still kicking around Holy Comforter and well into her eighties—peels away the big wave to show Jesus calming the storm.

And we all oohed and aahed at this technological wonder and of the story of Jesus' power and authority, little realizing that the story was probably less about Jesus and more about us. It has to do with our fear and the way that people in the spiritual life respond to those threats.

What is it we fear? It would almost be an easier to say what don't we fear, but we fear rejection. We fear disapproval. We fear failure. We fear meaninglessness. We fear illness. We fear poverty. We fear death. Not just our own death but the death of those we love. Of institutions that we love. Of ideas that we love. We fear death. Maybe that's the overarching fear that everything else derives from.

It's interesting in this story how different it is from stories that we might expect in the movies, say. In the movies, these disciples would have reached down deep into this well of courage and faced the storm alone and conquered it. Not in this story. They panic. And they turn to Jesus, their teacher, their master, to make everything okay.

What does Jesus do? Well, he makes it okay. And then he turns to them and speaks and what he says is interesting. He doesn't say 'where's your courage?' What does he say? He says *where's your faith?* Where's your faith?

When a small child awakes crying in the night and we go to comfort the child, pick them up out of their bed, we hold them, we comfort them, what do we say? There's nothing to be afraid of. I don't think that's what Jesus was saying. And if the truth be told we're not really telling the child the truth either. No, the Monsters, Inc. critters are probably not in the bed or in the closet. If you flip the light on and look under the bed it's going to be dust bunnies and a lost sock.

But to tell that child there's nothing to be afraid is not entirely true. If it was true we wouldn't say don't speak to strangers. If it was true we wouldn't admonish children from getting in a car by themselves with an adult that they're not sure of. If it was true we wouldn't have policies at every level of the church protecting those children. If it was true we wouldn't go to such great efforts to make sure they have their inoculations

before they go to school. If it was true we wouldn't be spending so much money on car seats and requiring that they wear seat belts. We wouldn't be putting house alarms in our homes. We wouldn't have insurance policies for everything imaginable. We wouldn't have large standing armies. We wouldn't have exotic weapons systems. We wouldn't have spies. We wouldn't have security guards, police, border patrols, and on and on and on.

Jesus didn't say to the disciples there's nothing to be afraid of. There are no threats out there. He said, "Don't be afraid." *Where's your faith.* There are threats in the world. But what Jesus is saying you can read in the collect for today.

In speaking to God we prayed earlier: 'For you never fail to help and govern those whom you have set upon the sure foundation of your loving kindness.' When we're on the sure foundation of God's loving kindness, those threats, those very real threats do not have the last word. **God** has the last word.

What Jesus holds out to us are these words that he spoke to the storm: *Peace. Be still.* That goes to us as well. He calmed the storm; he also calmed his disciples with those same words. And he spoke those words from a place of profound trust in God's last word that we can find peace and stillness when we are threatened by the winds and waves of life.

God is with us. God is in us. And all that happens, all that is, is in God. *Peace. Be still.*

In Michael Lindvall's commentary on this gospel he refers to John Bunyan's classic allegory, "[The Pilgrim's Progress](#)". And in that great tale there's the primary figure whose name is Christian. Christian is the archetype for all of us struggling to live the life of faith.

So Christian and his companion, Hopeful, are trying to cross this turbulent river. And they waded out into this river and as they're going down, Christian cries out, "I sink in deep waters"—I'm drowning, right?—"I sink in deep waters. The billows go over my head. All his waves go over me." And then Hopeful replies in an equally realistic statement by one filled with grace, "Be of good cheer, my brother! I feel the bottom and it is good."

Just imagine. But try to slip past this stilted language and see, even at the bottom of the turbulent river, the security of that firm foundation. In the face of all the threats, all the threats—and if you think there are no threats you're clearly not paying attention. In the face of all those threats may we respond with that fearlessness that comes from standing on that firm foundation of God's loving kindness with a peace and a stillness that comes from our depths, from our deepest core, that is centered in the peace of God that passes all understanding. Without thinking that there is way of fixing everything so that there are no longer any threats.

There's an image—a very striking image—that comes from post-Katrina New Orleans. And it's the photograph of a cemetery and in the cemetery you can see these trees, these live oaks with the Spanish moss that have been ripped out of the ground and have crashed down all over. There's debris everywhere. Crypts are broken open. The flood waters have percolated coffins out of the ground and broken them open. It is utter devastation. And in the midst of that is an undamaged statue of the risen Christ with arms wide looking out over the devastation as if to say: *Peace. Be still.*

Amen.