



Reeks: Groeiende Vryheid Van

Titel: ... Vrees

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Datum: 21 April 2013

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I want to read to you a story that you are very familiar with, I'm sure, and I hope that today that through it God will speak to us with fresh meaning. It comes from Matthew chapter eight. Listen carefully.

And then Jesus got into the boat and his disciples followed Him. Without warning a furious storm came up on the lake so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and they woke Him, saying, Lord, save us. We're going to drown. And He replied, you of little faith, why are you so afraid? And then He got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and they asked what kind of man is this. Even the winds and the waves obey Him.

Friends, I want to begin this morning with one of my favourite stories. It's told by a Spanish priest who works in India. His name is Carlos. And he tells a story of cycling down a country road in India just after the monsoon rains. So everything was looking very beautiful, very lush, very green, and as he peddled his way down this road he suddenly became aware of a strange stillness in the air. He knew that something was happening. All of creation around him became unnaturally quiet.

And so he stopped his bike, he got off, and he began just to look around. Suddenly he saw the reason for the quietness and for the stillness and for the silence. About 20 metres away from him in the waist high grass there was a cobra standing up, as cobras do. Its hood was open, its tongue was flicking, and its eyes were fixed on a little bird sitting on a branch in a tree about 20 metres away from the cobra. And Carlos says that this little bird was frozen stiff. Somehow it had got itself caught in the stare of the snake. It was paralysed with fear.

Even though this little bird had the whole sky, the whole sky into which it could fly, it was absolutely paralysed. And he puts it very beautifully. He said, even



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though this bird had a voice it couldn't sing, and even though it had its wings it couldn't fly. And so what Carlos does is that he walks towards the cobra and he starts waving his arms so as to get the cobra's attention. And he broke the stare of the snake. Then the bird found its voice. It began to sing again. It found its wings and it began to fly.

Now, I don't know about you, but that image sticks with me, that image of a little bird, paralysed by fear, with a voice; it can't sing, with wings; it can't fly. That's what fear does to us. And I have a hunch that, as we come together here for worship in this auditorium this morning, I have a hunch that some of us also are caught in the stare of the snake, that we too, that we too have a voice, and perhaps we're not singing anymore. We have wings, and we're not flying. That what fear does to us. It takes the zip out of life. It renders us ineffective for our daily living. It sometimes even causes us to do terrible things to each other. It paralyses us.

So what I'm going to do, friends, against that background today, is I want to invite you to come with me, just for a moment, into this incredible gospel story where Jesus is with some men who are very, very frightened. You know the story well. The disciples follow Jesus onto the lake in a boat. You will know that the Jewish people of that time were very frightened of water. They were not a seafaring people. They worked the land mainly. And very often the sea is a metaphor for evil and darkness and tragedy and chaos, so already there is a bit of a fear for the sea in the Jewish heart of the disciples.

And they're out there. Waves come up. They're frightened. They're frightened without, they're frightened within. They call out to Christ, who's sleeping. Jesus wakes up, speaks to them, and then He speaks to the waves and the wind. And we are told that the disciples are amazed, and they say, who is this that even the waves and the wind obey this Man? I've been living with that story. I've been turning that story over and over and over in my heart and my mind these last few days. And there are some things that I've found very, very helpful, and I want to share them with you.

In my own experience this week, just in terms of some of my own anxieties and fears, God has spoken very deeply to me through this story. And I'm praying that somehow, somehow, God will speak a liberating word into your
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life perhaps today, especially if there's anyone here caught in the stare of the snake. You find yourself paralysed by fear. You have a voice; you've forgotten how to sing. You've got wings; you don't fly anymore.

The first thing that I learn from that story is that I don't think we will ever, ever find freedom from fear until we acknowledge that we are frightened. I find it very striking when I read that story over and over that the disciples do not pretend not to be scared. They don't cover up their fear. They don't mask their fear. They acknowledge their fear. They admit their fear.

I was reading yesterday in preparation for today, and I was reading the words of a psychologist, David Benner. He's a very wise psychologist, and David makes this interesting observation in one of his books. He says that one of the things that keeps us in bondage to fear is that so often frightened people don't think they are fearful. I found that very, very insightful, that often those of us who are really fearful don't think we are frightened.

We just deny our fear, but it comes out in other ways, in our bursts of anger, in our compulsive behaviour, in our need to control everything in our lives and the lives of others, in our chronic busyness, and underneath all those things so often are these fears that we just don't want to face. Can I invite you today to acknowledge your fear? I don't know what it is, but will you ask God to reveal the fear of your heart to you.

Fear has many faces. Some of us are fearful of intimacy. Some of us are fearful of being on our own. Some of us are fearful of failure. Some of us are fearful of success. Some of us are fearful of pain. Others of us are fearful of pleasure. Some of us are fearful of loving. Some of us are fearful of losing those whom we love. Some of us are fearful of loss of image, others of us fearful of loss of control. Some of us are fearful of what others think of us. Some of us are fearful that others are not thinking of us at all. Some of us are fearful of life. Some of us are fearful of death. Some of us are fearful that there is no God. Others are fearful that there is a God.

Can we name our fear today? Can we acknowledge it? Can we externalise it? This is the first step to finding freedom. But then we must say something

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else. As I look at that story, did you notice what the disciples do with their fear? They bring their fear to Christ in conversation. And when we do that, we will experience two consequences. On the one hand, when I begin to bring my fear to Christ, when I talk about it, when I share it, when I bring it into conversation with Christ, what happens is that my relationship with Christ gets deeper.

If you were to ask me, Trevor, what is the one thing that you are learning about prayer at the moment, can I tell you what that is? I'm learning to be emotionally honest with God, and as I share the different emotions that I have with the Lord I find my friendship with Him getting deeper and deeper and deeper. My experience of His love gets deeper, and what does love do? Love casts out fear. That's the one consequence. The other consequence is that when I bring my fear to Christ I can let go of it. I can trust Him with it, whatever it is.

I think in simple pictures. So can I give you a picture? You know, sometimes when I'm praying and I've got fears, I have a picture of an escalator and I see myself taking my fear, whatever it is, and putting it in a little brown packet and putting it on the foot of this escalator, and then I watch it go up and away. Usually with me it comes down again on the other escalator that's coming down, so I've got to pick it up again, put it back into the packet and send it off again, letting go of it, sometimes ten, 20, 50, 100 times, until one day it doesn't come down again.

Can I invite you, friends, to bring your fear today into conversation with God, with Christ? Become emotionally honest with the Lord. Things begin to happen. Your relationship with Him deepens and you find that you are able to let it go.

Can I say one more thing? Go back to that story. We begin to find freedom from our fear when we acknowledge the authority of Christ over life and death. That's what happens to the disciples. They're on the boat. The storm is up. They are petrified. Jesus speaks to the waves and to the wind. Did you notice their response? They say to each other, who is this Person? Who is He that speaks to the winds and the waves and they obey? Who is this Person who has such authority?

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For the past 30 years I've been reading the gospels over and over again. I try to read all the scripture, but I go back to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John again and again and again. The gospels present Jesus as the one who has ultimate authority. That's how the gospel present Jesus Christ. He is the one in whom all authority dwells. Read the gospels. He has authority to forgive sin. He has authority over evil as he releases people from demonic influence. He has authority even over the Old Testament. What does He say? You have heard what the Scriptures say but I say unto you.

He has authority over the elements as He calms waters and speaks to waves and winds. He has authority of claiming exclusive allegiance from human beings. Other human beings point to God. He says, follow me. He has authority even over death as He raises Lazarus from the grave. Christ is the one in whom all authority dwells, and as I enter into relationship with the one who has all authority, and as I begin to do what He tells me I find that even in the midst of my fears I can be faithful.

Let me give you a simple example. Some years ago, I went mountaineering for the first time. I'm a city boy. I know nothing about mountains, but I knew the guy who was taking me onto the mountains for the first time. His name was George. He has spent his life on mountains. He has authority. When it comes to mountains George has authority. When he told me what to pack I packed what he said. As we climbed, as we walked on ledges, as we went up rock faces I did what he told me to do. I acknowledged his authority.

Even though I was very scared I was able to do things, because I trusted his authority. And it's sometimes exactly the same, that even in situations where I may be petrified and very scared I acknowledge the authority of Christ and I keep doing what He wants me to do, and I discover that even though I'm frightened I can be faithful. I can keep moving. I can keep living. I had a lovely tweet on my timeline this week. I found it very helpful. Courage is fear that has said its prayers. I like that.

Let me end. I wonder, fiends, today, if there's anyone here today who is caught in the stare of the snake. You find fear doing terrible things in your life, taking the zip out of life, the joy, rendering you just ineffective at times,
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paralysing you like that little bird on a branch. Like Carlos I want to wave my arms with the gospel of Christ today, and I want to break the stare of the snake in your life so that we today may discover our voice again and sing, and our wings, and fly again. May that happen today. Amen.

Let's pray together. Lord, thank You so much that we can come to You as we are. We don't have to pretend. We don't have to cover up. We don't have to be who we're not. Some of us today are very frightened about things that are happening in and around our lives, and we want to name them, Lord, and we want to speak about them with You. And as we do this, Lord, will You draw us into a deeper confidence in Your friendship and Your deep love for us? Help us to let go of those fears, and even if they come back, Lord, help us to let go of them again.

But above all today, Lord Jesus, we want to acknowledge Your authority. You are the one who has come and lived in our midst, died on our behalf, and You rose again as the Lord of life and death. And, Lord, we ask that in our own lives, as we acknowledge Your authority, as we take You seriously, as we follow Your word, may we discover, Lord, that even in those moments when we are fearful we can be faithful and we can follow You.

So come, Lord, minister to us very deeply today, and may this morning be a moment of discovering again our voice and our wings, that we may sing, that we may fly again. This is our prayer, and we offer it to You in Your name and for Your sake. And together, with all God's people we say together, amen, amen.

Friends, may the freedom, may the freedom of Christ be with you. God bless you. Take care, friends.