

Fear Factor

CrossRoads May 3, 2009 David Reed

Luke 8:22-25

It's 4 a.m., and you're wide awake--palms sweaty, heart racing. You're worried about this swine flu virus, you're worried about your kids, your aging parents, your marriage, your job, retirement funds, your Christian life, your health, someone's health. your sex life, someone's life...the screens just keep popping up. Breathing evenly beside you, your spouse is oblivious. Doesn't he--or she--see the dangers that lurk in every direction? Must not, otherwise, how could he, with all that's going on, have talked so calmly at dinner about a summer vacation?

At the beginning of an article about fear TIME Magazine reported, "It would be a lot easier to enjoy your life if there weren't so many things trying to kill you every day." (How Americans Are Living Dangerously, *November 27, 2006*)

It appears as if we constantly have a great deal around us to be worried about. Here are just a few of the fears listed from an article called "Phobias From A to Z" (TIME Magazine, Saturday, Mar. 24, 2001). I have a fear of trying to pronounce them in front of a room full of people...

ablutophobia: fear of bathing

allodoxaphobia: ... fear of opinions

anablephobia: ... fear of looking up

arachibutyrophobia: ... fear of peanut butter sticking to roof of mouth

barophobia: ... fear of gravity

lachanophobia: ... fear of vegetables

chaetophobia: ... fear of hair (explains some of us)

verbophobia: ... fear of words

homilophobia: ... fear of sermons

Allow me to say that in no way do I seek to make light of those who truly struggle in these and many other ways. It does seem that the human being is prone to worry and it touches every life in this room.

TIME Article by Bill Tancer, "What Are We Afraid Of?" Mar. 29, 2007 Identified 10 fears by investigating 1500 "Fear of.." searches on the internet over a 12 week period.

Top "Fear of" Searches revealed what preoccupied the minds and hearts of people...the fear of: 1. Flying; 2. Intimacy; 3. The dark; 4. Death; 5. Spiders; 6. Driving; 7. Love; 8. God; 9. Success; 10. Being alone (*Source: Hitwise*).

Is it interesting to note that of the top 10 – all 10 are answered in the first 3 chapters of Genesis... That of Our spiritual nature, death, creation, control, purpose and relationships.

At the end of the day, it seems to me, that a good part of living falls under the category of risk assessment and management. What is it that constitutes a real and what makes up a perceived risk or threat and what is the difference.

For those that work specifically with anxiety and fear, stress comes from circumstances that signal a threat. Fear is the short-term response that these circumstances produce in men and women or most creatures. Anxiety has a lot of the same symptoms as fear, but anxiety is a feeling that lingers long after the circumstance and fear have passed.

Not all anxiety and fear is bad. They are vital to human life. It is God's design and are quite handy in keeping us alive. Anxiety and fear are what keep us driving at reasonable speeds and stopping at all stop signs, it keeps us from stepping off cliffs or in front of trains, from trying to ride a lion or bonking a gorilla on the head with a stick, or from waking-up our spouses taking an afternoon nap. Essentially, we fear what we perceive or understand has the power to harm the fragile nature of our lives.

Sometimes there's an obvious cause for anxiety and fear, as with the people around the World Trade Center collapse, or in an area where this virus is spreading quickly. Other times, we don't know why we can't stop worrying about what has happened...or why we can't stop worrying about the perception of what might happen.

The thing is our bodies and minds are wired to react exactly the same to a real threat or the vivid perception of one. A feeling that makes our hearts race, the palms of our hands sweat – and can bring fear and depression.

This week we are facing both a real and perceived threat. The Swine Flu Virus. Have you found yourself thinking about it as move through your day, when someone around you sneezes, coughs, or shakes your hand? Has it popped up on the radar screen as you fall asleep...with a sense of anxiety either lingering in a shadow or boldly standing in the way of the future?

It is real because there are people getting sick, even dying, as is true of the flu season every year. It is perceived because there have been no reported cases in The Baja...yet we see people wearing masks, canceling school, whispering about the wisdom of a church gathering, there are rumors about closing the borders, just mention the word “flu pandemic” and we grow tense.

What is the Christian response to the Swine Flu and other real or perceived fears in life? What does God say about anxiety and fear?

First we must recognize that God made us WITH a built in anxiety and fear reaction to all threats. It keeps us alive by taking reasonable precautions. It brings us face to face with the fragile nature of life, in essence, we are brought to a CrossRoads encounter of our created response and the creator of the response. In the face of this it seems we are made to experience anxiety and fear...what is evident is that we have come to fear the wrong things.

Luke 12:4-5 ⁴My friends, don't be afraid of people. They can kill you, but after that, there is nothing else they can do. ⁵God is the one you must fear. Not only can he take your life, but he can throw you into hell. God is certainly the one you should fear!

In Luke 8:22–25 we find the story of Jesus asleep during the storm. This story reveals our doubts about whether he really cares for us and truly is in control.

“One day Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s cross to the other side of the lake.” So they got into a boat and started out. As they sailed across, Jesus settled down for a nap. But soon a fierce storm came down on the lake. The boat was filling with water, and they were in real danger. The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!” When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and the raging waves. Suddenly the storm stopped and all was calm. Then he asked them, “Where is your faith?” The disciples were terrified and amazed. “Who is this man?” they asked each other. “When he gives a command, even the wind and waves obey him!”

These disciples knew all about handling a boat, like most of us like to think we know about handling our lives, but they found themselves in a place of real fear. Once they call him, Jesus doesn't leap to his feet with a gasp; he gets up and speaks, not just to the wind and waters, but also to his disciples.

"Where is your faith?" Jesus asks them.

And they reply, **"Who is this?"** "He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him."

"Where is your faith?" ...“Who is this”

So what is the rebuke implied in Jesus' question? What does he mean when he asks, "Where is your faith?" Jesus is partly responding to their implied criticism that he had been asleep at the wheel and partly that they had begun to fear what they need not fear.

Have you ever come to a point when God seems to be asleep at the wheel? Isn't that what underlies many of our anxieties and fears? Isn't that why “pandemic!” has such a lingering and dreadful sound...so does cancer, market crash, bankrupt, ...what's your trigger word? What makes us cry out just like the disciples "Master, Master, we're going

to die!" It is not the cry of conviction or even a confession of need but a desperate attempt to attract God's apparent absence and lack of attention. To which Jesus answers "Where is your faith?" Where is your trust? Jesus' perspective seems to come from another planet doesn't it? **"They can kill you, but after that, there is nothing else they can do"**...these statements stand in such vivid contrast to what we understand of life... We are made for God's kingdom and its peace not for the world and its worry.

Matthew 6:30-34. "... if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today."

"Who is this man?"

If Jesus' question exposes my doubt, it is this question of the disciples that reveal why he said it. It points to something in our hearts that we would really rather ignore. Despite all our Bible reading, assertions about faith, and prayers, we still ask "Who is this"...we are not entirely convinced that God can do what he has said he will do...so when the real and perceived threats of life suddenly bellow we end up in anxiety and fear and not in peace and trust.

In Psalm 91 God says he is our refuge and fortress, that he will save us from the deadly pestilence, that we will not fear the terror of the night nor the arrow that flies by day nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand will fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you

In Romans 8:35-39 Paul said Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

How, then, should we interpret Jesus' slumber in the midst of the storm? Surely not as a sign of his absence or a mark of his disinterest. The slumber of Christ was a reflection of his trust in his father. And Jesus' question "Where is your faith" leads us...to our knees

trusting that no matter what comes our way...lions, furnaces, viruses, economic crisis...our response is one of trust in our heavenly father not anxiety and fear.

Christ's ability to sleep in the midst of the storm helps us see a new dimension to "trusting God." Our experience of trust must ultimately have its origin in God's own trustworthiness. God is not anxious. God is not afraid. God is certain of the future. The wind and waves and viruses that are so troubling to us cannot reach what God holds onto within us.

This, then, is the answer to Christ's question, "Where is your faith?"

>Our faith is not in the wind or any one of the things that blow into our lives, neither is our fear. Not in the waves. Not in the sails. Not in the ship. Not in our charts and maps. Not in our skill as sailors. Our faith is in the one who "commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him." Our faith is in the God who became flesh and dwelt among us. Our faith is in the one who died on the cross and rose again. Our faith is in the King of kings, and the Lord of Lords, the Prince of peace, the Loin of Judah, The Bright morning star, The Son of God, Jesus Christ and he does not forget those who love him.

Let's try to remember that when anxiety and fear crash over the bow.