

***Fruitful and Free***  
*Abiding with Faith*  
*Mark 4:35-41*

Tomorrow we will begin 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting. We are one of 9 churches in town that is walking into the fall with a season of prayer and fasting. Many of us would say that the last 5 to 6 months have left us a bit lethargic and lost in our seeking after God. 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting is an opportunity to seek God with increased structure and intensity. We don't really need a "Braveheart Speech" when it comes to seeking God; we really need a simple, effective plan that we can follow (not a formula to follow mindlessly, but a plan to follow thoughtfully and wholeheartedly). I really believe that God wants to use this 21 Days to put us on a solid path both individually and corporately.

We introduced the 21 Day of Prayer and Fasting last week. We talked about how our spiritual growth is a partnership between us and God. There are certain things Jesus expects us to do, and certain things only He can do. Specially we saw from John 8 and 15 that Jesus expects us to abide in Him and let His words abide in us; we are to stay put in Him and His Word. As we abide, Jesus promises to give us freedom and fruitfulness.

During our 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting, we are going to employ three core habits (or disciplines) of abiding: Scripture, prayer, and fasting. Beginning this morning we are going to spend three weeks discussing how we can practice these "disciplines of abiding" in healthy, God-centered ways - in faith, with repentance, and in community. Today we will consider how we should approach Scripture, praying, and fasting with faith. Our text is Mark 4:35-41 that was read earlier. After we see what this passage teaches about faith, we'll apply it to these disciplines.

We know from Mark 4:1 that a large crowd had gathered to hear Jesus; it was so large that Jesus found it necessary to teach from a boat that was anchored offshore. Verses 35 and 36 set the context of this passage:

35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." 36 And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him.

When evening came **Jesus** had the idea of getting into the boat and crossing over the other side of the Sea of Galilee; we'll come back to this in few minutes.

37 And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.

The Sea of Galilee is well below sea level and is surrounded by mountains. This makes it susceptible to violent storms which form very quickly. Mark tells us that the windstorm was so fierce that waves were breaking into and filling up the boat. As you might imagine, the disciples were terrified; they believed that they were about to die.

By contrast, Mark tells us in verse 38 that after a long day of teaching, Jesus had fallen asleep.

38 But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

Jesus was at the back of the boat asleep with His head resting on a cushion. The disciples' question (accusation, really) is interesting, isn't it? They interpreted Him sleeping as a lack of compassion: "You don't even care that we are perishing!" In reality, the whole reason that Jesus had become one of them was so that they "would NOT perish but have eternal life."

The disciples' reaction is so very true to life, isn't it? When we experience danger (medically, emotionally, financially, relationally, etc.), we sometimes react as the disciples did: we panic and accuse God of not caring about us. Like the disciples, we sometimes fail to consider that two things can be true at the same time: we can be in legitimate danger AND the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each care deeply about us (even though it seems to us like the Triune God is asleep).

Notice in verse 39 what Jesus did after the disciples woke Him up. He speaks to the wind and the waves. He commands them to do what He wants.

39 And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

It's significant that Jesus doesn't pray to God, "Father, please calm the storm because we're about to go under!" Because He was God in the flesh, He Himself had authority over the storm. Jesus rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Throughout Scripture, the sea (or "the waters", "the deep") represent chaos and evil and even demonic forces. There are verbal connections to this verse and Mark 1:25 which describes Jesus confronting an evil spirit indwelling a man:

25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!"

The term "rebuked" is the same term used rebuking the wind. "Be silent" is the same term used when Jesus spoke to the sea; it's translated "Peace!" The point is that the disciples had seen Jesus authority over demons; but now they are seeing that He has equal authority over creation.

The disciples had asked Jesus a question. Now He asks *them* a question:

40 He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?"

Jesus isn't saying their emotions were wrong or invalid. He wasn't saying that they weren't in danger. He's saying that *they shouldn't have panicked*. By that time they should have had faith (or confidence) in Him, confidence that He cared about their well-

being and that He was powerful enough to deliver them from danger. After all, it was Jesus' idea to get in the boat in the first place. And they had seen already seen Jesus cast out demons with a word and heal people with a touch (see Luke 4:35 and 6:10). Jesus wasn't mad that they woke Him up; but He expected them to address Him with faith, not with an accusation ("Do you not care that we are perishing?").

We tend to think, "Either you have faith or you don't, and there's nothing you can do about it." There is a sense in which faith is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-9). But Jesus is implying that they were responsible to add up the mounting evidence of who He was and **choose** to trust Him.

Verse 41 gives us the "take away" from this passage:

41 And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

A literal translation of the first part of the verse is, "And they feared with a great fear. . ." They were afraid during the storm; but when they realized that Jesus was able to calm the wind and the waves by speaking, "they feared with a great fear." At the end of Mark 4, they feared Jesus more than they had feared the storm. Mark writes that they said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

They were experiencing what is elsewhere called "the fear of the Lord." We'll learn about the fear of the Lord as we read a chapter a day in the book of Proverbs. If you have the fear of the Lord you don't run **away** in terror; you **draw near** because you are awestruck that God is great AND God is good.

The Point of Today's Passage: ***Jesus expects us to trust Him as the Son of God who has all authority and who loves us perfectly.***

If Jesus expected His disciples to trust Him before the resurrection, how much more should we trust Him after His death and resurrection. A believer is someone who, by definition, is confident that Jesus existed with the Father and the Spirit from eternity past, took on flesh and blood to identify fully with us, lived a sinless life, died on the cross to pay for our sin, rose bodily from the dead on the third day, passed through the heavens, and is now enthroned at the right hand of God. In other words, we already believe that Jesus was willing to do the most extraordinary things imaginable so that we might know Him and enjoy Him for eternity. Does it not follow that we have every reason to trust Him in the midst of every storm and difficulty and disappointment we face in this life? If we have trusted Him for the greatest need we have (the need for salvation), shouldn't we also trust Him for lesser things?

That's the logic of Romans 8:32.

32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Because of who Jesus is and because of what He has done for us, we can trust Him to do for us whatever we need. If you read the rest of Romans 8 you'll see that Jesus doesn't "calm every storm" in the sense of removing all danger; Paul speaks of things like tribulation, distress, and danger. His conviction was that none of those things can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

During the 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting, we are encouraging you to identify one specific area of your life in which you need freedom and fruitfulness. You might need freedom from a sinful habit; your seeking over the 21 Days will focus on that issue. Or perhaps you need freedom from destructive, unhealthy patterns of thought (whether critical, angry, judgmental, cynical, negative, or arrogant). What we saw last week in John 8 and 15 that as we abide in Christ and let His words abide in us, Jesus is the Son who will set us free and who will make us fruitful.

During this 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting, we are practicing three core habits of abiding. These are simple, time-tested ways that people have sought after God for thousands of years. Today's passage suggests that we practice these three habits **with faith**. Let's think briefly about approaching the Word in faith, praying in faith, and fasting in faith.

**Approaching the Word with faith.** I have noticed over the years that some people read the amazing promises of God's Word and think, "Sounds good in theory; I'm sure it works for other people but not me. You'd agree with me if you knew my past and if you knew how deeply my sinful habits are ingrained in my flesh." Have you ever thought and felt that? I sure have.

But we have another option: to believe God's Word even if we haven't yet experienced the truth it's describing. For example, last Sunday we saw in John 8:31–32 that Jesus made this promise:

31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

If we approach this Scripture with faith, we say, "Jesus, because of who You are and what You've done, I believe what You are telling me. As I abide in Your word, I believe that I will know experientially the truth, and the truth will set me free. I believe that *You* will set me free."

Specifically, before you read Proverbs 1 tomorrow, express to God your confidence in Him and His Word. As you read, say an internal "yes" to the things you are reading. Tomorrow when you read how Lady Wisdom is out in the street crying out for people to "choose the fear of the Lord," respond in faith: "Yes, Lord, I choose to fear You; I choose to saturate my mind with Your Word. I trust that as I abide in this word and it abides in me that You will give me true freedom."

**Praying with faith.** There are many valid, biblical aspects of prayer (praise, thanksgiving, lament, etc.). But when the Bible says that someone "prays to God," it is most often

speaking about making requests of God. And many of those Scriptures stress the necessity of asking in faith, confident that God is able and willing to answer the requests that are compatible with His will. James 1, for example, we read this:

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

When the disciples woke up Jesus, they did the opposite of what James is describing. They were being driven and tossed by the wind and the waves. Instead of asking in faith for Jesus to calm the storm, they accused Him of not caring that they were perishing. By contrast James tells us to ask in faith without doubting because God is generous and willing to give us good gifts.

As you pray about the area of your life in which you need freedom and fruitfulness, notice whether you are paying in faith or whether your requests remind God of the disciples' request in Mark 4 ("God, You probably don't care and probably won't answer this request, but here goes. . ."). Why not take some risks in prayer and trust God to deliver us from the things that keep us from experiencing the glorious freedom promised in Christ! Notice what you are praying and whether or not you are praying in faith.

Also, if you sign up for our 21 Days experience, you'll receive an email each day that contains several prayer points which are different each day. We'll be praying for different people and ministries at Faith; we'll be praying for the various missionaries that Faith supports; and we'll be praying for our own influence in the lives of those who need Christ. Instead of mindlessly praying down a list, let's pray in faith and trust God to do more than we can ask or imagine.

Fasting with faith. In Scripture, people fasted for specific reasons. Fasting is a way that we intentionally disrupt our routine. When we have a twinge of hunger, we are reminded, "I am seeking God for freedom and fruitfulness in this specific area of my life," and we turn back to prayer and the Word.

In several places Scripture we're warned against having the wrong motives in fasting. For example, in Matthew 6:17–18 Jesus taught:

17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Instead of trying to impress other people, we should fast in faith, mindful that **God** sees and rewards us. By fasting, we're saying to God, "Seeking You is more important to me than lunch today" (or than social media or than television or than meat or whatever you're abstaining from during these 21 days). We're encouraging you to fast in a way that works for you. If you go to the registration page on the Church Center app, you'll find a write-up on various ways to fast; you'll also find a link to a sermon I preached on fasting in January.

As we seek God the next 21 Days, Jesus expects (and empowers!) us to approach the Word, to pray, and to fast with faith.