

INTERRUPTED BY FEAR
Mark 4:35-5:20

I. INTRO

A. I worked my way through university with a full-time security job at a place called **Phelps Dodge Corporation**. This wasn't your normal office building. They had purchased the summer home of a NYC railroad tycoon; a 55 room mansion called **Montebello**. It was a gorgeous estate—set way off the main road. And it was a great place to work—because I could put in 40-48 hours—and get most of my studying done at the same time.

-The only time it got weird was when I'd been there about 5 hours, everyone was gone—and it was dark. But I could make all my rounds—even up into the dark recesses of the old servant quarters without getting creeped out.

-One night, about 10 p.m., I was finish my rounds, humming a song, when I heard this yelling in the dark of a room—and saw someone running at me with a big stick. My **brain** instantly recognized it as my brother waving a broom and yelling at the top of his voice—but my heart and stomach didn't. So I stood at the water fountain and yelled like a little girl! It was my birthday and he'd come by to surprise me with pizza. I was upstairs, so he broken in through a window—to add a little terror to the surprise. My stomach pretty much refused the pizza. I stuttered and twitched for the rest of his visit.

B. Terror happens. Funny, isn't it, how today we make movies out of someone else's terror—just to get the adrenaline rush from it. But the truth about us is that when the terror is **real**, we hate it—and what it does to us.

1. Has anyone here ever felt **terror? Fear?** Sometimes it's momentary—a passing phenomena of teaching one of your children to drive.
2. But terror what I would call an unwanted interruption. But it happens. Sometimes it's a brief interruption--and sometimes it puts life on hold—to the point where you wonder if life will **ever** be normal again. It knocks on your door at work. It wakes you up in the middle of the night and nags you until the sun rises.
3. Jesus was **not** exempt from terror. I know we talked briefly about fear a couple of weeks ago—but since we seem to be living in a culture **gripped** by fear these days—I thought it might be helpful to see how Jesus faced it—and stared it down. After all, He **is** our leader!
-Could anyone this morning use some help in dealing with terror?

II. TALES FROM...THE OTHER SIDE!

A. In reading through Jesus' life, there two stories in a period of about 12 hours when it seemed like fear touched everything. As we read the accounts, watch how fear and terror bounce back and forth like a tennis ball. Let's read the first account:

As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s cross to the other side of the lake.” So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water.

Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, “Teacher, don’t you care that we’re going to drown?” When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Silence! Be still!” Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. Then he asked them, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?” The disciples were absolutely terrified. “Who is this man?” they asked each other. “Even the wind and waves obey him!” (Mark 4:35-41 NLT)

1. To understand this story, you have to understand that when Jesus suggested that his disciples go to **the other side**, that was not the place they’d always wanted to visit! It was a place of dread.

It was the place they most wanted **not** to go to—with a reputation as being infested with pagan worship and haunted by demons. People were **afraid** of the other side.

-And traveling by boat into unknown, scary territory at **night** made things worse. We now have a pretty clear picture of what these fishing boats were like—based on one discovered buried in the sand of the Sea of Galilee back in the 80’s.

About 28 feet long, 8 feet wide, and 4 foot deep. With 13 people in it—it was **not** a safe place to be in a bad storm!

-So they’re in crisis.

It’s dark; waves are crashing over the side—swamping the boat. Jesus’ disciples are scared half to death! The professional fishermen in the group had undoubtedly lost friends—maybe family members—**just like this!**

2. Guess where Jesus is in this mess? He’s **sound asleep** in the stern of the boat with his head on a cushion—and the disciples are **shouting** at Him, in essence, “What’s the matter with you, Jesus? How could you go to sleep at a time like this! I mean, I **know** everyone would like to die in their sleep—but **not like this!**

-Well, Jesus gets up, stretches, yawns—and scolds the wind and waves like naughty children. “Hey! Settle down! Stop that! Be quiet! Calm down!” Doesn’t that sound like parents going after hyperactive kids who’ve just eaten a load of chocolate? And **guess what!** Unlike kids, the wind and waves **instantly** obeyed. And the sea turned to glass. It’s dark, the disciples are soaking wet and seasick—and says, **Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?**

3. Remember what I said about the fear in this story being like a tennis ball? It starts as a knot of uncertainty in their stomachs; it grew as the storm grew; it erupted on Jesus as he was sleeping. Jesus nukes the storm—and now they’re **absolutely terrified** of Him!

-In the quiet darkness, with the oars thumping and splashing, you can hear the disciples murmuring to each other, “I thought **knew** him!” “Yeah, me too—but I’ve never met **anyone** who can order the wind and waves around!” “Who **is** this guy?”

- B. Well, next you hit part two of the **fear-fest**. And this one’s ever scarier. The disciples have been up all night. Some undoubtedly got seasick—and had a major protein spill in the lake—lost their energy **and** their nerve.

They’re wet. All they want to do is get out of the boat, kiss the ground—then crash and burn. But they’re barely out of the boat when the fear they’ve had of the **other side** comes true!

So they arrived at the other side of the lake, in the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus climbed out of the boat, a man possessed by an evil spirit came out from a cemetery to meet him. This man lived among the burial caves and could no longer be restrained, even with a chain.

Whenever he was put into chains and shackles—as he often was—he snapped the chains from his wrists and smashed the shackles. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Day and night he wandered among the burial caves and in the hills, howling and cutting himself with sharp stones.

When Jesus was still some distance away, the man saw him, ran to meet him, and bowed low before him. With a shriek, he screamed, “Why are you interfering with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In the name of God, I beg you, don’t torture me!” For Jesus had already said to the spirit, “Come out of the man, you evil spirit.” Then Jesus demanded, “What is your name?”

And he replied, “My name is Legion, because there are many of us inside this man.” Then the evil spirits begged him again and again not to send them to some distant place. There happened to be a large herd of pigs feeding on the hillside nearby. “Send us into those pigs,” the spirits begged. “Let us enter them.” So Jesus gave them permission.

The evil spirits came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the entire herd of 2,000 pigs plunged down the steep hillside into the lake and drowned in the water. The herdsmen fled to the nearby town and the surrounding countryside, spreading the news as they ran. People rushed out to see what had happened.

A crowd soon gathered around Jesus, and they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons. He was sitting there fully clothed and perfectly sane, and they were all afraid. Then those who had seen what happened told the others about the demon-possessed man and the pigs. And the crowd began pleading with Jesus to go away and leave them alone.

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon possessed begged to go with him. But Jesus said, “No, go home to your family, and tell them everything the Lord has done for you and how merciful he has been.” So the man started off to visit the Ten Towns of that region and began to proclaim the great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed at what he told them. (Mark 5:1-20 NLT)

1. How many adrenaline junkies do we have hear? How many of you think you might have enjoyed this? This is like a scene out of a horror flick—only **this** is real.

-This is a man at the far end of a very destructive lifestyle—suffering from what the Bible calls being **demon possessed**. There are no neat, clean definitions of this in the Bible—just the records from Jesus’ life to say that it’s not a misdiagnosis of mental illness—it’s real. It’s fact. Two things about **are** clear: These forces of evil are dangerous—and deceptive.

-In short, demons or evil spirits—or unclean spirits—are spirit beings who defected from God along with Lucifer/Satan. Their goal is to terrorize the earth, destroy everything they possibly can—and destroy the souls of humans.

Paul, an early church leader, makes it clear that we need to be aware of these powerful forces of darkness—and guard ourselves with truth, righteousness, peace, faith, hope, and the teaching of the God’s Word. He says:

...We are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.
(Ephesians 6:12 NLT)

-These are **powerful** spirit beings and, when they are given an entry point, they can overpower a human soul and mind and totally control a person—even speak through them.

That’s what you see in this story, even though it may sound weird and crazy.

2. The second thing that is **so** clear and **so** comforting—is that Jesus has **no** fear of the forces of darkness; but they are **terrified** of Him. That’s so clear in this story. When the guy come running, naked, bloody and crazy of the graveyard—you wonder if he’s going to attack them. Instead, he throws himself in front of Jesus and says, “I know who you are, Son of The Most High God!” The evil spirits that possess him are the ones begging for mercy.

-This man had spent **years** in a nightmare, more terrifying that we can possibly imagine. From everything I know about people who have experienced this—their lives become a living hell—filled with darkness, torment and confusion. And, in turn, they can terrorize whole **areas**—just like this guy. My guess is that the Disciples had heard of him. He screams and cuts himself to find relief for his inner pain.

3. It’s clear that there’s no just one evil spirit in this man. Using his vocal cords, the demons call themselves legion—a reference to a Roman legion made up of 6000 soldiers. Ironically, one of the scary things about this area was that it was a heavily fortified Roman area—filled with soldiers! Now, I’m sure that the animal rights people would have a problem with what happens next—when Jesus tells the demons to leave and they enter a herd of pigs who are also terrorized and run down the embankment into the Sea of Galilee—committing

swine-icide. I had a Professor in seminary who entitled this incident, **deviled ham!**

-The terror passes from the pigs to the herdsmen—and from the herdsman to the people of the town. They come to see what’s going on—and instead of screaming, chaos and terror, they see a man who’s clothed and sane. And suddenly **they’re** afraid of Jesus—a man who can solve their problems and wreck a thriving business—with a single command.

4. Do you see how fear travels in this story? It bounces like a ball through this entire story: A man terrorized by the demonic, terrorizes others. The Son of God shows up—Someone the demons are terrified of. Sent into the pigs, they terrorize them—and the sight of that, plus the loss of income—terrorized the herdsmen—who pass their fear to the people in town. The people in town, who used to be terrified of the madman—are now afraid of Jesus.
-The truth about terror and fear—is that it’s contagious. When we’re afraid—we carry the fear virus.

C. A few weeks ago I talked a little about fear. Anyone remember what the most **common** command in the Bible is? **Fear not! Don’t be afraid!** Anyone remember how many times that command is given? **366**—one for every day in the year—including Leap Year. And the most **common** reason why we don’t need to be afraid? God says, ...**For I am with you!**

1. The **clearest** thing about fear, the terror in these two stories is what it’s **like** to have Jesus with you in scary, life-threatening, soul-threatening circumstances.
-How many of you have ever thought, “I can **tell** when it’s Jesus leading me to do something because, if He is, it goes smoothly?” Anyone? Did you notice that in both instances, it was **Jesus** who got them into the mess? **Jesus** picks the time; **Jesus** picks the route, the means of transportation, and the destination. And yet, from an outsider’s perspective, it turns into a terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad night.
-And you don’t expect Jesus to be sleeping on a cushion—a **cushion** in the back of the boat when everyone’s life appears to be in danger, do you? Ever thought, when you’re in a terrifying situation, “Where’s God—**sleeping?**” Ever thought, “How could God let this happen! Here I am trying to take the right direction, do the right thing and **BAM!** I get hit in the head!
-It kinda makes you wonder, doesn’t it?
2. One thing is clear—when God says, “Fear not—for **I am with you,**” it **means** something! Whatever else is clear about this story, it’s clear that Jesus is Lord over **everything!** And especially the stuff that is out of my control—and your’s--which is a **lot!** What I struggle with is—how do a live out the **fear not!** of Jesus in a fearful, fear-producing world? I’d **love** to obey that command—but I struggle! Do you?

III. FEAR...THE ULTIMATE TERRORIST

- A. To be a part of the human race is to have to face things in life that are threatening to our safety, our health, our well-being, our finances, or people we love. We **know** that. Now, I know I’ve said this before, but there is a **healthy** kind of fear that helps us

survive, and an **unhealthy** kind that handcuffs us to a sense of powerlessness. Let me give you a couple of scenarios and see if you know the difference:

*The fear that keeps your child from running after their skateboard when it goes out onto the road: **healthy** or **unhealthy**?

*The fear that keeps you from auditioning for a band you've **dreamed** of being a part of—**healthy** or **unhealthy** fear?

*What about the fear that keeps you from expressing your deepest and truest feelings to the cop standing by your car window writing out a speeding ticket: **healthy** or **unhealthy**?

*How about the fear a guy has of booking the golf trip of a lifetime—thinking his wife might be upset about postponing their second honeymoon: **healthy** or **unhealthy**?

1. Some fear is good and healthy—and may actually **save** our lives. But for the most part, according to the Bible, fear is crippling; it's **not** a good thing; in fact fear may be the single biggest factor in us **not** doing what God wants us to do and **not** going where He's called us to go.

-The question Jesus asks his followers here is,

“Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?” (Mark 4:40 NLT)

It's clear from what Jesus says here that there are two mindsets: fear—and faith. Faith that God **is** in fact with you and that He **can** be trusted—especially in situations that are way out of our control.

-The other alternative is a mindset of fear. “I'm on my own—so I have to keep myself safe at **all** costs.” And **all costs** usually—eventually--includes sacrificing our obedience and our mission.

2. Here's one thing you can take home with you, chew on, build into your life. We are called to fear God—that is, live in awe of Him, respect Him, respect **Who** He is—that He's powerful and good and compassionate and perfect in all He does. But **fear**—the kind that paralyzes us, stalks us, keeps us small and intimidated ineffective and **obsessed with padding our lives** is **not** from God.

-Paul, an early church leader wrote to his understudy, Timothy:

For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. (2 Timothy 1:7 NLT)

-Do you see the two mindsets? On the one hand, **fear and timidity**—on the other, **power, love and self-discipline**. Very different mindsets, aren't they. When Paul talks about living with courage, He's not talking about dare devil stunts—like Evel Knievel stuff. -What God wants to see growing in us is the everyday courage in the unpublicized, unnoticed moments to say **yes** when we need to say **yes**; to say **no** when we need to say **no**.

I want, when everything is said and done, to have **lived with courage**—with power, love and self-discipline.

3. Let me get specific about what makes the difference. It's your perspective. Perspective makes a **huge** difference. I heard a story years ago about a girl in university who understood that **very** well! She wrote this letter home to her parents:

Dear Mom and Dad, I have so much to tell you. Because of the fire set off by the student riots, I experienced temporary lung damage and had to go to the hospital. While I was there, I fell in love with an orderly, and we have moved in together. I dropped out of school when I found out I was pregnant. He got fired because of his drinking, so we're going to move to Alaska where we might get married after the birth of the baby. Your loving daughter. P.S. None of that really happened, but I did flunk my chemistry class, and I wanted you to keep it in perspective!

-When it comes to **fear**—the perspective of Jesus' followers is, ***I am WITH you!*** All power and authority has been given to me. I love you so much I'd give my life for you. I am intimately acquainted with the details of your life—and even when it seems like I'm sleeping or nowhere to be seen--***I WILL BE THERE!***

4. John, one of Jesus' closest disciples, makes a **very** profound statement that I think gets to the very **core** of dealing with fear. In the context of talking about our fear of judgment, he said ...***perfect love expels all fear.*** How is your love made complete with someone? Experience, right? Getting to really, **really** know them—that you can entrust your secrets, your vulnerabilities, your life into their hands.

-This doesn't happen right away. It happens over time and over a number of experiences. You slowly come to the realization, "I can **trust** this person!" In our relationship with Jesus, there are two forces at work to help us **trust** that He is totally in our corner. One is the power within. Remember what Paul said? God has not given us a spirit of timidity and fear! The Spirit is the One who raised Jesus from the dead. He's at work inside to give us power, love and self-discipline.

-But the **other** piece to that is us actually trusting God in our relationship—and finding out over time—that He is **totally** faithful, loves us more than we love Him—and is at work in **everything**. Friends—**that's** what gives us perspective.

-I want you to think about something. Why do you think Jesus allowed the two terrorizing experiences His disciples faced to happen right up against each other? I think it was because He knew that they would need to see Him put a storm in it's place—to have confidence that He could handle a man jammed with demons. The truth is—**that** is how faith gets built. One experience at a time. If you think, "I'll just do life on my own—and if I hit something **really** big and out-of-control and terrifying—well **then** I'll trust God. It doesn't work that way. Perfect love casts out fear—and love only becomes perfect or complete with time and experience.

5. Jesus **always** challenged his followers on their faith. ***Where's your faith? When are you going to grow faith? O you of little faith! If you only had the faith the size of a mustard seed!*** Here's the question: Why is **our** fear a big deal to God? Why would the command, **Don't be afraid!** Be the most frequent command in the Bible? It's because the pricetag on fear is way too big. Fear is a thief.

-See, God doesn't ask His people to just live low-risk, easy, painless lives. It's **never** been that way. The kind of life He calls us to live—and the life I think you **want** to live—is a life that demands our best. A life that leads us to face the things we **don't** want to face and to give what we're **afraid** to give.

-On the other hand, Satan's goal is to intimidate us into living little tiny shrunken lives. Peter, wrote to the people under his care:

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. (1 Peter 5:7-9a NLT)

-Anyone know why lions roar? It's to terrorize and paralyze their prey. Satan **always** uses fear to intimidate—and stop us—keep us from what God wants to do. That's the reaction isn't it—fight or flight.

Tell me: What happens inside when you run away from challenges? You feel like a wimp. You begin to think things like, "**I can't handle this! I can't take this!**" -God always, **always** calls us toward courage. Not based on confidence in ourselves—but on confidence in Him. You see this all through the Bible.

*He says to Abraham, "Leave your home and go with your wife, Sarah, to a place I will show you. As an old man, you will give birth to a son—and you will be the father of nations! But you'll have to leave everything and everyone you're familiar and comfortable with. You'll have to **trust** Me!"

*God says to Moses, "Go and confront the most powerful man in the world. Tell him, "Let my people go! I'm starting a new community that will bring hope to the world! But—you'll have to trust me!"

*God says to Esther, "I know that this King chose you as part of his harem because he thinks you're eye candy—but I want you to risk your life and go to him and ask for the lives of your people! But...you'll have to trust me!"

-And they did—but not everyone does. One day a rich young guy came to Jesus and asked what he needed to do to really, **really** live! And Jesus told him to go and sell everything and give it to the poor—and follow him. He said, "Trust me on this!" But they guy didn't. He just walked away. And I'm guessing that this young rich ruler one day became an old rich ruler—and remembered

that day Jesus challenged him to not make his money and stuff his god—and **he didn't have the guts to obey?** How many of you think he breathed a sigh of relief—and in his heart felt, "Wow! Right choice!" I don't think he did.

- B. Life is **full** of challenges and opportunities to live with courage. As I see it—our challenge **every single day** is to say **YES** when, for our sake, for other's sake, and for the sake of the world we need to say **YES**. And to say **NO** when we need to say **NO**. I think **everyone** faces fear—we just face it in different areas.
1. This need for courage gets into every day life—sometimes simply saying no to something that is holding us back, keeping us from what we know God is calling us to. Sometimes we are embedded in relationships we **know** are wrong—and we're too afraid to make the hard call.

-Sometimes, as parents, we know our kids are developing destructive patterns in life—and we need to courage to say “No”—and **hold the line!** Sometimes we’re stuck in addictive patterns—and we’re too afraid to just ask for help. And sometimes we need the courage to endure in a situation that’s just really, really hard. And we need courage to take life one day at a time. **God has NOT given us a spirit of timidity and fear—but of power, of love, and of self-discipline.** Would you walk toward your fear? Would you face it down?

2. But these two stories, I believe, are focused on the mission of Jesus in this world. To make all things right, to bring the **shalom**—the power, peace, joy and goodness of God to the **other sides** of this world. The scary places we’d rather not go—but are **called** to do go.

-Look at these two stories. It was Jesus plan all along to go to the **other side**—and set this guy free from the awful bondage he was in. In fact, it was his plan to release a whole area from someone who had become the local terrorist. If **fear** had won they day, they wouldn’t have even gotten in the boat. If **fear** had won the day—they would’ve never **kept** going. And imagine what would’ve happened if they did get to the other side; 12 good Jewish boys confronted by a naked, bloody crazy man—and 2000 pigs!

-What was the deciding factor in this story? It was Jesus. Jesus called them to go where they were **most** afraid of going. If we’re honest, He **allowed** their lives to be in jeopardy. The danger in the storm—and the danger from the demonic world was **real!**

3. Can we just talk for a minute? Terror—fear—is very real. Now, sometimes we pay other people to scare us—like in a movie, or on some crazy adrenaline ride at a park. Life gets boring—and so we jazz it up with a little fear.
 - Know what our tendency is for the rest of our lives? To spend most of our time and energy trying to **make life safe**. Bullet-proof. We obsess about **our** health; we obsess about **our** financial security, we insure **everything** to make sure most of **our** stuff is risk-free. And, if we have kids, we try to insure that they will be at the top of the heap and have everything paid for so they don’t have to struggle.

-Does this remove the fear from our lives? Of course not! There is **no way** to live a risk-free, fear-free, fail-free life—and die in our sleep at the age of 95 with a smile on our face and money in the bank!

4. There is nothing wrong with buying insurance, eating well, and planning ahead. **But not at the price of being the people God has called us to be, doing what God has called us to do, giving what God has called us to give, and going where God has called us to go.**
 - I don’t think fear-avoidance works. I think it actually works **against** us—because I think the only way to face fear, face terror—is to do what Jesus and his closest followers did in this story: **Head bow first into the storm! Don’t let fear stop you!**

-I think it would be a mistake to read this story and think, “This is so cool! If Jesus asks me to go someplace, it’s like kind of a heavenly insurance plan! I give money; I get it all back! I go somewhere He asks—and it’s like car insurance and medical insurance all wrapped into one package! I’ll be happy, things will work out hunkey-dorey—and me and my whole family will be safe from injury, bad diseases, harassment and the stomach flu!”

-And that’s not true. Jesus **will** be with you—wherever you go. No doubt about it. You will **never** be out of God’s care. No doubt about it. But the danger is real; **sometimes** you will get hurt. Sometimes you will get betrayed, disliked, hassled, thrown in jail...and go bald! Life brings those kinds of things. Jesus said, “In this world you will have...**trouble!** But then Jesus said, “If I were you...**I wouldn’t worry about it! Because...I have overcome the world!**”
-Look at **anyone** who’s ever done anything worthwhile with their life. Has it been easy? Nope. Have things always gone as the prayed they would—and planned for? Nope. Have they always been loved and understood? Nope.

But the common denominator for those who have lived with courage, inspired other, and made a difference—is that they **kept on going! They headed into the storm—sometimes with their mouth dry and their knees shaking!**

-Know why people do stuff like this? It’s because when we will step out, when we will go to the **other side**—the place that scares us half to death—God does amazing things.

4. I’m sure the disciples, as they rowed back across the lake, wondered, “What was **that** all about? A guy gets set free from demons, the people kick us out, and Jesus won’t even let him come with us!”

-What you find out is that this guy’s story had a profound effect on his relatives—and that **whole** area. Matthew records that, at a later point, Jesus returned to this area called the **Decapolis**—and people responded by the thousands. One man who said, “This is who I was; this is who I am. Jesus made the difference. Are you interested?”

IV. CLOSING

We live in a world where there is **all kinds** of desperation; huge need. God is looking for people who will face their fears, selflessly give their lives and resources. God searches for people who are afraid—but still move forward. That, friends, is our heritage and our calling. What is God asking you to do—and will you let **fear** keep you from it?