



## **WOW: Word Of the Week**

**Your choice: fear or faith**  
**April 15, 2020**

Shortly after the coronavirus pandemic was declared, on March 27 Pope Francis gave a meditation on Mark 4 and the calming of the storm. His message: let us give our fears to Jesus so he can conquer them. Perhaps a coincidence, but the next week I read several sermons on Mark 4, I received at least one email with a lesson on Mark 4, and I listened to sermons on Mark 4. Many of those lessons followed Pope Francis and treated fear as a normal response by a Christian in difficult circumstances.

May I put the story in context to help us understand how it contributes to the message of Mark?

In Jesus' conversation with the disciples, they had not yet developed faith. "Do you not yet have faith?" None, nada, not a little, not at all, according to Mark's gospel. Therefore, their fear was a function of having no faith, their unfaith. Jesus is first saying, "for a disciple, faith is normal, even in fearful times."

The problem of Mark 4 is that the disciples did not yet understand who Jesus was. "Who is this?" They did not understand his power, his purpose, his passion and compassion for them.

The calming of the wind and waves is the last story in Mark 1-4 – four chapters that describe who Jesus is. The evil spirits knew his identity—his closest disciples did not. Do we? Do I? Do you?

A quick survey of Mark 1-4 will orient us, to help us understand the story in its context.

1:14-15, John in prison, believe the good news! A fearful situation, encouragement to believe.

1:40, a leper, fearful but faithful, you can make me clean, Jesus' compassion.

1-4, multiplied stories of fear and faith, dwelling side by side in the same human heart

In fact, in the short ending of Mark, the last phrase of the book in 16:8 says, "they were afraid."

The Gospel of Mark challenges us to understand an important dynamic: Unresolved fear, angst, generic fear, abstract fear -- is not normal for the Christian. Fear of (reverence for) God, yes.

The key is not to eliminate fear, the key is to become comfortable with a great Bible truth – faith and fear often dwell side by side in the human heart.

To understand this truth, Mark 9 is helpful. Coming down from the Transfiguration, Jesus encounters a father with a convulsive son. 9:22, "if you can do anything, help us." Jesus responded, "If you can? All is possible to believers." The father's words reflect great truth: "I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief." Faith and unfaith—side by side.

Christians respond to the fearful situations of this life differently.

The older, mature disciple John, 60 years after Jesus' ministry, "Perfect love casts out fear," 1 John 4.

Can we grasp God's perfect love, communicated in sending his Son with all authority and power? Do we get it? Ingest it, digest it, believe it, live it?

When I begin to understand God, I learn to appreciate that God is sovereign, simply put--God is God. Because seeing God clearly was so difficult in the Old Testament, God sent Jesus.

Now when I understand who Jesus is, I have made major progress toward dealing with fear, using the power of faith. Faith may waver, Abraham's did not (Rom. 4), but ours may.

Understanding who Jesus is, the communication God's perfect love, is essential to dealing with fear. Jesus said to them, "why are you afraid? Do you not yet have faith?"

Yes, the key is this: developing a faith that clearly knows who Jesus is. Do we not yet have faith?

In one sense, the opposite of fear is faith. As faith grows, fear diminishes. With no faith, total fear. With total faith, no fear. Our reality is usually somewhere in the middle. Faith and unfaith side by side. Faith and fear, side by side.

I pray for you increasing faith.