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Jesus said to them, "Why are you afraid?"

Have a thrilling day!

That's the standard greeting at Six Flags Amusement Park.
Or at least it was back in the day when I took my kids there.
They're now old enough to take themselves (thank God!).
Maybe some of you will be going there this summer
to have a "thrilling day" in a relatively controlled environment.
One of the charms of the rides at a place like Six Flags
is that they only last a few minutes.
You see the previous batch of riders getting out alive as you get on.
Although every season there are occasional horror stories of
rides gone terribly wrong,
that may only add to the perverse thrill.

These rides are a strange mix of fear and excitement and fun –
an intensified version of a lot of life, actually .

Last week, of course, was Father's Day, with Mother's Day last month.
Lots of sweet Hallmark Cards were no doubt exchanged,
but they only tell part of the story.
Being a parent or guardian of another human being
is the most awesome -- and sometimes terrifying -- role you'll ever have.

The same with the graduates we celebrated last week,
and now the graduating Scouts of Troop 4 today.
They deserve all the congratulations and good wishes in the world.
But they'll also need them.
Because after the parties are all over,
there's that vague, looming and absolutely *normal* fear of the unknown.

Whether we like to admit it or not, fear is a part of life.
Even the good parts of life.
We shouldn't be surprised to see the disciples afraid in today's gospel.

Yes, they were in the company of Jesus himself.
They'd seen his mighty works and heard his teaching.
But there they are in a boat, in the evening,
going across from a familiar place into foreign territory
when a windstorm hits and the boat becomes swamped.

You can't really blame them for being scared,
for questioning Jesus asleep on a cushion.
"Teacher," they implore, "don't you care that we're perishing?"

Of course Jesus cares.
He rebukes the wind and it ceases.
But Jesus cares too much to leave it at that;
he answers the disciples' question with one of his own:
"Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

Why are you afraid?

My mother was of that generation marketed to believe
that smoking was glamorous.
We knew from the moment she was diagnosed with cancer of
the esophagus, lungs and breast that it would not have a happy ending.
I was in my last year of seminary and surrounded by well-
intentioned people eager to comfort me.
I don't remember much of what they said and, frankly,
I found a lot of it rather tiring.
But I do recall standing in a lecture hall one day after class
when my friend Laurel looked me in the eye and asked, "What scares you most?"

I was so overwhelmed by my free-floating anxiety
I'd never thought of it like that.
And for me at least, this question helped calm me down, a bit.
It didn't make my mother's cancer go away; it didn't erase all my worries.
But it did help rein in some of my wildest fears.

Maybe it was the relief that Laurel wasn't trying to
make me "feel better" before I was ready.
She was willing to listen to what I needed to say, however jumbled.

She wasn't afraid of me being afraid.

She basically asked me the same question Jesus asked the disciples,
Why are you afraid?

Right now I'm afraid for our country,
what feels like the erosion of some of our highest ideals.
I'm afraid for the kind of world we're leaving to the next generation,
including my own children.

Why are *you* afraid?

In today's gospel, Jesus doesn't say "Fear not" –
that familiar Biblical phrase used by angels and
other messengers in anticipation of a Divine encounter.
Instead, Jesus himself is a Divine presence in the midst of the fear,
in the midst of the storm.
He doesn't ask the disciples *if* they're afraid, but *why*.

Fear is a part of life. A natural part of life.
Even the good, the best, parts of life.
And God only knows that there are not-so-good parts of life
that wear our patience, break our hearts and make us sick with fear.

Jesus isn't shocked by our fears.
He knows and has experienced it all.
He experiences it with us today.

Sometimes, when we're in the throes of fear,
it's difficult to keep sight of this.
That's why we need each other to do it for and with us.
Not necessarily to make it all better,
but to be with us in the storms of life . . .
because *that's where Jesus is*.

Let this be a safe place
where we're free to ask one another the question that Jesus asks us all,
Why are you afraid?

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