

Tending Ancient Paths

The Paradigms, Posture, and Practices of Jesus

Ghost or God?

I have a daughter who loves to be that person who stands in a dark closet and waits to give me a 'boo'. When she is home and I am getting ready for bed I have to slowly step out of the bathroom - step back and turn the light on in my closet, postured to deal with a person who wants to scare the liver out of me. I have never been the Dad who did this kind of thing to our kids but last month I did hide in the pantry while she was in the bathroom and, like any young adult, she headed for the pantry and as she opened the door I said 'hi' to which she physically shuttered and shrieked...to which I said 'sorry babe but you earned that one'. I do understand the humor involved in watching the involuntary bodily reaction of your Dad to being startled.

I know what I am talking about here are, for her, expressions of affection. But the truth be told we all have things that can startle us...to our core. We all have our own 'ghost stories' don't we? Places of trauma that have left land mines of fear that in some cases even direct and hold our life in pain and brokenness. *'Oh man you scared the snot out of me'*, is exactly what Jesus' disciples felt in Matthew 14. Jesus sends them away on a boat so He can have some time alone but it is not long before they are feeling very alone. First the winds pick up and soon the gravity of their situation begins to crash upon these experienced fisherman. The longer the night stretched - the more they began to live from those deep seated emotions which included fear. Hadn't they just seen Jesus heal the sick, feed thousands...yes. But that is not what is on their minds and what they are feeling in their bodies as this night goes on. What is really in their thinking is clearly seen as Jesus approaches them on the water...they are terrified! Upon seeing Jesus with their eyes, their mouths express what has a hold of them and it was not settled hope and peace. What their minds, bodies, and emotions perceived in the wind and waves was 'certain' doom, destruction, and death; *'a Ghost!'* For any good bible reading Jew, that was a sign of impending doom.

Their eyes see Jesus but their feelings and their bodies are telling them a story of doom. The trauma of their personal stories combined with the wind and waves tells them, with 'certainty', what is happening. Driven by pain and fueled now in fear, their conclusion is they are seeing something that is surely meant for their destruction. That cannot be the Jesus they just left on the shore who restores and makes whole. Their fear and trauma keep them from locating Jesus IN the storm, the darkness, and uncertainty. They are verbalizing how their fear is telling their story. They saw someone that looked like Jesus but 'knew' it couldn't be Him, *a Ghost can't be God!*

We see something in the disciples experience that is profoundly true. **Our fears are not very good at telling us the truth about our lives.** When I was 'startled' I felt the 'fight or flight' urge and it took me a minute to be reminded, wait, she isn't here to harm me, she is my daughter that I love and who loves me.

God in Christ came to tell another story to His friends that night and it is so much more than just walking on water. He has invaded the realm of uncertainty, fear, and destruction to tell another story. You are not alone - storm, darkness, and uncertainty are not a hindrance or barrier-in fact they are exactly where He comes to meet His disciples (and us); Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid. The very elements that threatened to destroy the disciples became the environment in which they recognize Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus revealed Heaven in what they concluded was hell. What they perceived as certain death they now recognize as new life, hope, and salvation and that, beloved, is good news.

Oh the stories that we tell ourselves! Some openly, some not so openly -especially the ones bound to our shame, guilt, and insecurities. And this beloved is exactly when and where we need to surrender and allow the Gospel to tell us the truest story about ourselves. We are loved, forgiven, safe, and cared for by the God who came into our story -who embraced all that lies behind our deepest fears- to proclaim Shalom 'peace' which means -nothing broken, nothing lacking, all things made whole.

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And the secret is simply this: **Christ in you!**

Yes, Christ in you bringing with him the hope of all glorious things to come. Col 1:27b, JB Phillips

Interesting that the many times I have heard this text taught it has been primarily from the context of 'lack' and our need to have 'more' faith. Yet it was Jesus who said your real need of faith is not about quantity. In fact, a mustard seed will do. It is about surrender.

After Jesus identifies Himself and speaks to the bad story teller, fear, '*do not be afraid*', Peter speaks out loud what everyone is feeling, '*if*', if it is you. The jury was still out - Peter was still not sure of what story to surrender to - God or Ghost. So here is what I want to say about Peter walking on the water - this exchange was not about what he accomplished in his faith. **It was about locating and recognizing Jesus in the storm and surrendering to the story He was telling them; 'I am here, fear does not need to rule you - you are not alone, you are cared for.'**

Matthew 14:33 records the rest of the disciples reaction with this conclusion - NASV - "*You are certainly God's Son!*" What a fascinating verse - I mean, is Matthew recording that Jesus passed the God litmus test? Weren't they pretty sure this was God's son at His baptism when the sky opened and God spoke about how please He was with Jesus. No, this was not some point about these guys suddenly becoming 'certain' about their convictions (remember later they all walk away). Beloved, the Good News of the Gospel was never about us having 'certainty' - that we will never doubt or struggle with fear in the future. The Gospel is Good News that invites us to anchor our hearts, not in certainty about facts, but in the revelation of God and His love! In the midst of life's storms, this is a story of good news that is greater than all our fears, ***Take courage it is I, do not be afraid.***

Ghost or God, beloved, **is a mystery not a religious math problem.** It makes no sense to think that the very elements that threaten our lives are the same elements from which new life comes. Yet, isn't that the way of the cross? Isn't that the story of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection? This is the gospel we proclaim! From tragedy, suffering, loss, and grief came hope, life, and the most beautiful picture of love ever displayed on the earth.

Yes, I still find myself slowly walking out of doors or around corners...to watch out for my daughter who may be staging her antics. It is normally just playful but there have been a couple times that I have been so startled that I shuttered and shrieked - to her credit she will quickly say sorry and put her arms around me to reassure my old shaken body. Oh Dad I love you, she says through her laughter - I love you too babe...what started in fear ends in assurance and affection.

Our storms and fears are the place where we often first feel and hear our own ghost story - 'abandoned by God and left alone to fend for ourselves in a cruel world'. But...

God in Christ tells another story: *Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid.*

Could it be that the very elements that threaten to destroy you can become the environment in which you recognize Jesus as the Son of God? Where you locate Jesus- revealing Heaven- in what you had concluded was hell. Could it be that what we have perceived as certain death or impending doom can become a place where we can now recognize new life, hope, and salvation? Surrender to another narrative, beloved, to the story He is telling-the Gospel.

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