



Date: 16th & 23rd June 2024

Theme: Faith and Fear (or Seeds and Storms)

Bible Reading: Mark 4: 26-41

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PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

For this session, you may like to provide some **seeds** as we reflect on the parables. We will also be focussing on how God helps us through the 'storms' of life, our turmoil and fears. As you prepare, we suggest meditating on the hymn: *Have faith in God, my heart* (Singing the Faith, no.466, by Bryn Rees). This will be our last session in the usual format before the summer holidays. But that doesn't mean you have to stop meeting... Our next issue will be a *Summer Special*, featuring ideas for different activities!

PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS

As you prepare for the session, read the passages from **Mark chapter 4: 26-34, and 35-41** (which are the set gospel readings for these two weeks). First, we have two parables about seeds and growing – as Jesus invites us to imagine the Kingdom of God. Secondly, we read of the disciples experiencing the power of God through Jesus in the famous 'calming of the storm'. Verse 10 of chapter 4 shows that the disciples were unsure of the meaning behind Jesus' parables, and yet still curious. The disciples were on a journey to discover more about Jesus, and God's kingdom. *Are you also on that journey?* Reading the story of the storm, try to imagine yourself in that boat. In contrast to the disciples being gripped by fear, Jesus is lying there on a cushion asleep! *If you were one of those disciples, how would this experience make you feel? What emotions or questions would you have?*

STARTING THE SESSION: A PRAYER

Creator God,
transform our hearts and minds by your Holy Spirit.
May our faith be based on the firm foundations that we find in your Son, Jesus Christ;
A faith that turns fear and doubt into hope and confidence.
Help us to nurture the seed of faith that you have planted in our hearts,
and may we seek to nurture and encourage the faith of those around us. Amen.

FINDING OUR ROOTS

In small groups of 2-3 people, discuss:

The disciples had so much to learn about Jesus. They failed at first to understand some of his teachings, but when they were alone with him, he led them to understand more. *Are there passages in the Bible that you find difficult to understand? Do we often feel drawn to the passages that feel more comfortable?*

If possible, **hold a tiny seed in your hand**. Inside that seed is all the potential to grow into a plant or a tree, producing flowers or fruit. Jesus has planted a seed of faith in our hearts. *Reflect on your journey of faith as you hold the seed. Who has been significant in your life, in nurturing your faith?*

Jesus demonstrated the contrast from fear to faith as they were out on the water when the storm arose. *Can you think of a time when you have been fearful? Please share this with one another if you feel comfortable doing so.*

Jesus brought stillness and peace into the situation. *When have you encountered God's stillness and peace recently, even in the midst of difficult or stressful situations?*

READING THE SCRIPTURES

Read together the Bible passage: Mark 4:26-34

Background Information: Having previously shared with them the Parable of the Sower (**Mark 4:1-9**), Jesus gave the disciples two further parables about seeds in this passage. Repeated over again are the words: “this is what the Kingdom of God is like”. Notice how the man put a sickle to the grain once it was ripe. The word “harvest” was a metaphor for the final judgement. However, as we then move on to the next section about the mustard seed it appears that the one sowing the seed has a more deliberate approach, carefully planting the seed. Contrast this with the scattering of the seed in the earlier parable of the sower. The image of a mustard seed in Matthew’s gospel is also used in a different way, as a measurement for what can be done with the smallest amount of faith (**Matthew 17: 20-21**).

Read together the Bible passage: Mark 4:35-41

Background Information: Following the series of parables, the focus takes us to the Sea of Galilee. Here Jesus displays power over the natural world. The story continues the quest to understand just who Jesus is. Jesus challenges the disciples over their lack of faith and their overwhelming sense of fear. Jesus performs a miracle in which the disciples are very much at the heart. Unlike many of the other miracles, this one impacts them directly, and saves them!

DIGGING DEEPER

It can be very easy to read the seed parables as an opportunity to sit back and wait for the ‘harvest’. *How do we nurture our faith and the faith of others whilst we wait?*

The image of the mustard growing and becoming a large bush reminds the reader that our faith is not to be kept just to ourselves. Our faith is to be shared. *How well do we share our faith with others, particularly those who don’t have faith? Where do we need help or greater confidence?*

The disciples, some of whom were experienced fishermen, were overwhelmed with fear as the storm arose. ‘Storms’ in our own lives can sometimes distract and cloud our vision of God. *What might we put in place to help us to refocus our faith in God when things are challenging?*

Mark is usually more concise and gives fewer details than the other gospel writers, yet in this story he makes a point of saying Jesus was not just asleep, but on a cushion. Jesus was clearly at peace, with an inner calm beyond our understanding. *When the storm was raging, why wasn’t it enough for the disciples to see that Jesus was at peace? How can we find this inner peace, through our storms?*

*Are **faith** and **trust** different?* The Greek words used in the New Testament are in fact the same. *How do we use these words? In what ways might we think of them as different?*

Why is faith difficult at times? What resources do we find helpful in those moments?

Jesus calming the storm showed the disciples something that increased their faith. *Can you recall occasions which have increased your faith?*

We sometimes talk about people who had a great faith. *What marks them out as having a great faith? Do people see the faith in us?*

There is an old Irish proverb which says “Fear knocked at the door, faith answered and there was no one there”. Reflect on this proverb. *How may the Holy Spirit increase our faith and diminish fear?*

PRAYING TOGETHER

In a time of quiet, out loud or in the silence, bring to God your prayers for the world and the church:

Pray for the churches across the world who are persecuted because of their faith.

Pray for those who are consumed by fear and see no hope.

Pray for all who are going through ‘storms’ in their life and need to know God’s peace within them.

Pray for those who are new to the faith, that their faith will grow.

Pray for those who are wrestling with questions of their faith.

Pray for more faith, and the opportunity to share your faith with others.

Share **the Lord’s Prayer** together (*which invites us to pray, like the disciples: Save us; deliver us!*)