My Brothers and Sisters in Christ, let us pray. Lord God of our Hearts, Minds, Spirits, and Souls, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

All of the events of these last few Sundays as well as the next few take place around the sea and amid the coming and goings of crowds. These crowds press on Jesus and clamor for his attention And at the beginning of this reading, they’re still here. Five times we hear of the crowds in this story (for the crowds see: Mark 3.9, 20, 32; Mark 4.1, 36; Mark 5.21, 24, 27, 30, 31). Their presence, the presence of the chaotic sea, the series of miracles, Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom—it’s easy to understand the disciples’ question as the chaotic sea is calmed at his command: “Who then is this?”

We have two miracle stories — a woman healed and a young girl raised from the dead — that are played out in point-counterpoint conversation with one another. Why? To magnify the impact of the stories and at the same time to focus the issue of salvation and faith which literally accompany Jesus’ actions.

Once the story locates us among the crowds alongside the sea, a privileged one, the leader of the synagogue arrives, falls at Jesus’ feet and “begs him repeatedly” for the life of his “dear little daughter”. When at this point we are told that without a word of response Jesus “went with him” with the large crowd continuing to press on him, we have every reason to expect a successful outcome. Let’s think about this: the prayer is right; the purpose is worthy; the prospect of healing and life secured. We expect a healing, which is Mark’s way of showing salvation is occurring.

But a woman comes and interrupts the narrative as well as our expectations. In fact, she joins the synagogue leader in the salvation she seeks, believing just a touch is all that’s required. Jesus may not know “who,” but the woman certainly knows “what.” In fear and trembling she falls down before Jesus and confesses the truth of what has happened to her. She had hoped for healing, but her hopes were far too small. The fear and illness that have defined her life still have their grip on her.

But this is the way of the good news of the gospel. When we come to God with no expectations, no judgements, and only our child-like, faithful selves, God’s kingdom responds in amazing ways. Jesus’ words fill her with more than she could ever have imagined. She is no longer just “a woman,” but now is claimed as a “daughter,” one whose “faith” has “made her well” (“saved” her). Now words and a promise have been added to the new reality in her life. She receives Jesus’ benediction that invites her to leave in “peace” (shalom). And almost as an afterthought, by the way, she receives the confirmation that she has been healed of her disease (v,34).

But the story is not yet over. In mid-sentence, while Jesus is still mouthing his benediction on the woman’s faith, people arrive to say that the leader’s daughter has died. In the same instant one person’s hopes have soared; but another’s have been dashed to pieces. One has been claimed as a daughter; another’s daughter has been lost. Faith is clearly at risk. The people put it so clearly, “Why even trouble the teacher any further?” What hope is left?

But Jesus’ words will not let the dashed hopes and fears remain unchecked. “Do not fear, only believe,” he says (v.36). Only here and in the parallel reading in Luke 8:50 are these two options juxtaposed so clearly in the New Testament. Fear and faith seem to have this thin line between them, don’t they? A better alternative translation might be in order here. “Do not fear, only believe” fails to represent what Jesus really is saying to the leader and to us.

If the command is “do not fear,” then it is already too late, and does not address the leader’s or our reality. Look, Jesus, here’s the problem. We are already, if not constantly, are always in fear, and the prospect of faith remains too distant. It should instead read as something like “Stop being afraid,” and “Go on living by faith.”

Do we see the difference? The present tense of both verbs calls attention to the transforming power of Jesus’ word to change our lives from fear to trust. How often we are called to that…”be not afraid”…but we do not engage in the rest, to trust God, however that happens. We are invited into a “God is bigger than that” transformation in which life and salvation now appears in a wholly new dimension—the dimensions of love, peace, joy through healing, at long last, our fear.

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

From Jesus’ word of promise, and the transformation from fear to faith as good as done, it remains for the rest of the story simply to fill in the details. We read them as ones who hold our breath, but we also know how it all turns out.

We silently say to the text, “don’t worry” as we read about the weeping and moaning; we smile knowingly at the misplaced laughter of the crowds who do not know what we know. And our hearts rejoice when Jesus takes the little girl by the hand and commands her “Arise”, a word that will be used later in another resurrection story. We, along with the crowd, are amazed.

But in our amazement, do we remember to connect fear and faith?

Jesus then surprises us again, but this time in a puzzling way; he tells us not to tell anyone about what we have seen. What will it be like to follow this Jesus on the journey of discipleship? In what way will our lives be transformed by this One whose words call us to “stop being afraid” and instead to “live by trust” in the promise of the good news of God’s kingdom among us?

Or do we so quickly forget, that in our amazement, we truly can overcome our fear with our faith?

Love, peace, and joy to you this day. Thanks be to God, Amen.