

-A couple years ago you may have remembered a news story about a Delta flight that took off from San Diego bound for Minneapolis. Everything on board was as normal, in fact it seems almost too normal, as both the pilot and the co-pilot fell asleep leaving the autopilot to fly the plane over 150 miles past Minneapolis. Air traffic control was finally able to use other aircraft to message the “sleepy pilots” who realized they overshot their destination and turned around immediately. The newspaper that posted this story also published the radar tracking history of this plane and it’s kinda interesting to look at. Most radar tracking maps show detailed movements of planes, slightly changing course or going up or down in elevation. But, for this Delta flight, you could almost tell the exact moment when these pilots decided to take a nap and turn on the autopilot because the course was a complete straight line that went right over Minneapolis and ended at Eau Claire when they finally woke up.

-I don’t know about you, but sometimes I find myself in situations where it seems like God has decided to take a nap and turn on the autopilot like these pilots. Sometimes I feel like my world, always adjusting and re-calibrating, just gets stuck going in one direction with no one awake at the controls. Maybe some of you have had or are experiencing similar moments.

-I know the disciples felt this way with Jesus asleep in the storm. In fact, if you notice, Mark makes the point as clear as possible to his readers by saying: “A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.” Jesus was in the stern (or back) of the boat where the rudder is! Mark makes it as clear as possible: Jesus seems to be taking a nap at the controls!

-And you know what? I think the disciple’s first question to Jesus in this situation is very appropriate: “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” In fact, the translation for the word “perishing” is a little weak. It was already used in Mark 3:6 when the Jewish leaders were conspiring to “destroy” Jesus. I think this gets the point across a little better: “Jesus, do you not care that we are being destroyed?”

-I’ll have to be honest, I know I have asked this to God multiple times. God, do you not care? God, are you awake?

-One could become disheartened from Jesus’ seemingly angry response: “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” Well gee, God, this my world seems to be flying on autopilot with what seems like no one at the controls...so yeah.... I guess I am afraid!

-Here’s the thing though.... What if Jesus’ angry response wasn’t for the fact that his disciples had fear, but was that their fear caused them to ask the wrong question?

-David Lose, President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, reflects on this text by saying: “Fear lurks just under the surface of a lot of the difficult moments in our lives. But is it unfaithful? This troubles me because I’ve long thought that faith doesn’t banish fear, but helps you cope with it. At the same time, I do see a connection

between fear and a lack of faith. Think of faith primarily as trust, not simply as belief (cognitive assent), but the kind of trust that motivates you to action.”

-Lose uses an example of someone babysitting your kids. You only let someone whom you really trust watching your little ones while you are away. He finally goes onto say: "Fear paralyzes, making trusting -- and the confident action that trust makes possible -- very difficult, if not impossible.”

-So maybe the issue isn't that the disciples are understandably afraid because of the storm, it's that they allowed their fear to overtake them so that they don't come to Jesus and ask, "Teacher, we need your help," but rather come already assuming the worst, "Teacher, don't you care that we're being destroyed?." This isn't a trusting or faithful request; it's a fear-induced accusation.

-So how do we learn to trust in our faith even when it seems like things are on autopilot? Well maybe water, in many ways the source of the disciples fear in this story, can also be a vehicle for teaching us to radically trust in our faith.

-I was with our youth yesterday floating down the Blackfoot River which was an incredible experience. Alan Pfister was helping to lead the group down the river. Alan has lived, of course, on the Blackfoot River almost all of his life so he knew where all of the good swimming rocks were. Our group stopped a place called "Cable Rock" where you were able to jump off a tall rock and then swim back to a rocky beach. However, because of the strong river current, you had to make somewhat of an effort to get back to the beach. I had the privilege of seeing Alan work with our own Noah Lofink who started to panic a little because he couldn't quite get through the current to where we were on the shore. He started to try and stop himself and "go up" the river toward us which failed. Alan calmly instructed him: "Noah, the first thing you need to know is you don't need to panic. You're alright. The second thing to know is never try going against the current of the river. Instead, always go sideways to the shore. You may end up a little down river, but you'll get to the side much quicker." Sure enough, trusting his advice, Noah got immediately to the side shore and the panic erased from his face.

-In stormy situations, can we trust the water enough to flow with the current and go sideways instead of trying to stop entirely and go back up river? Can we say: "God come here with me and guide me" instead of "why God don't you care.”

-This is the faith that we are called to. Faith that is trusting in a God who keeps promises. Faith in a God who, even if it seems, does not fall asleep at the controls but who shows up and says "peace" to calm the wind and waves. Let us work and lean on one another to not allow fear to get so strong that it paralyzes us and doesn't allow us to have this faithful trust. Let us work and lean on one another to not panic when the river washes us down a little, but together flow with it and make our way to the side. Let us work to, as a church, radically trust God even in our fear. Amen.