

Title: The Eye of the Storm

[Slide 1]

Text: Mark 4:35-41

Into the Night

Fear:

What makes you instantly afraid? I mean, when you see it or think about it, you panic.

[Slide 2]

A 2014 YouGov poll found that Americans are most afraid of – snakes. Then come heights, public speaking and spiders. 29% of us are afraid of needles; 24% of us are afraid of crowds; 13% of us are afraid of clowns.

When we experience a scary stimulus, the information takes two roads in our brains: the “**Low Road**” and the “**High Road**.”

[Slide 3]

- The **Low Road** is fast and messy. A fear response takes only 12 milliseconds to make it to the amygdala, which signals a full-scale fight or flight reaction. It completely bypasses the conscious part of the brain. You're in full fear mode before you even know it. Your heart rate jumps up, your pupils dilate, your veins constrict to send more blood to major muscles, blood glucose increases, digestion and immune functions shut down, and your brain stops focusing on small tasks. It has one job and one job only: Survival!
- The **High Road** is slower and more precise. The same scary stimulus is interpreted and evaluated by the brain, with the result reaching the amygdala in 250 to 300 milliseconds. During that extra time, the brain decides whether the scary stimulus is truly a threat. If so, it will agree with the message sent by the **Low Road**. If not, it will signal the amygdala to cancel the fight or flight response.

That's why when the little garter snake slithers out from under the wood pile I jump out of the way before I recognize that the snake is nothing to worry

about. The **Low Road** gets me out of the way “just in case.” The **High Road** assures me that this wasn’t a poisonous snake after all. And I survived!

Into the Night:

Mark tells us a story about a journey with Jesus that suddenly went terribly wrong. Jesus had spent the day teaching the crowds on the western side of the lake called the Sea of Galilee. He sat in a boat while He taught, and at the end of the day, it was time to move on:

[Slide 4]

Mark 4:35-37 NIV

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side."

Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.

A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.

The Sea of Galilee is well-known for the violent winds that sweep down from the mountains around it. Imagine setting out on a calm evening for the 8 mile journey to the other side of the lake. Well after dark, when you’re out in the middle of the lake, the squall hits with all its fury: The wind comes howling out of a pitch-black sky. Waves rise up unseen and splash into the boat.

That will get your amygdala firing!

Low Road or High Road

The Jonah Question:

Mark adds one more little detail about the boat in the storm:

[Slide 5]

Mark 4:38a NIV

Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion.

[Slide 6]

The boat that Jesus and the disciples were in was about 26' long, with a mast and 4 oars. It had a deck at the bow and the stern. Under the stern deck were bags of sand that were used for ballast. They were called "pillows." Jesus had crawled into this sheltered place and laid His head on one of these sandbags to get some sleep.

The terrified disciples were dumbfounded that He would be sleeping while they were fighting for their lives! They woke Him up with what you might call "The Jonah Question":

[Slide 7]

Mark 4:38b NIV

The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

If you know the Jonah story, you will remember that Jonah was a runaway prophet who went to sleep in a ship heading for the other end of the Mediterranean. The ship encountered a violent storm and the sailors, despairing of their lives, woke Jonah up with the question:

[Slide 8]

Jonah 1:6 NIV

The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."

I wonder if the disciples were asking themselves, "What kind of prophet is this Jesus? Is he another Jonah?"

Jesus' Questions:

Jesus got up from under the stern and took charge of the situation:

[Slide 9]

Mark 4:39 NIV

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

The words Jesus used when He spoke to the wind and waves are the same words that He used when He took authority over evil spirits. Here was the Lord of Creation, rebuking the demonic forces of chaos and evil, and restoring His Creation to its proper order. This prophet was no Jonah. He was Jonah's God present in human form!

Then Jesus asked two questions of His own:

[Slide 10]

Mark 4:40 NIV

He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

The word used for "afraid" speaks to someone who lacks physical or moral courage and therefore fails to do his duty in danger. This is the mindset of a person whose brain has taken the **Low Road** into fight or flight.

Jesus' second question challenges them to remember that there is another option when it seems like the world is turned upside down – the option of *faith*.

Low Road or High Road?

You see, Jesus' brain was wired just like the disciples' brains. His brain had a **Low Road** and a High Road when it came to processing danger. When the storm came up, He heard the shrieking wind, felt the waves pounding the boat, heard the water sloshing in the bilge. He *felt* the immediate wave of terror that gripped the entire crew.

But He refused to give in to the urgency and panic of the Low Road. Instead, He took the **High Road** – remembering the all-powerful God He served, and choosing to exercise the Creator's power and authority over the chaos all around Him. Just as He had silenced the demonic powers that oppressed a man in the synagogue, now He silenced the powers that threatened Him and His disciples.

That's what *faith* is all about: Taking the **High Road** of remembering to put our trust in God and His mighty power over all things when the Low Road is signaling wholesale disaster. Jesus could sleep during a howling gale. As the storm raged, Jesus was living a different Reality:

[Slide 11]*Isaiah 26:3 NIV*

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.

The Eye of the Storm**A different kind of fear:**

The boat rocked gently in the sudden calm. Overhead, the clouds parted and the moon lit a shimmering path on the water. The disciples gaped at one another in the dim light. In hushed whispers Mark tells us they asked each other the question:

[Slide 12]*Mark 4:41 NIV*

"Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Now they were experiencing a totally different kind of fear. Mark says that they were "afraid with a great fear." This is the word he will use when he describes Peter's fear on the Mount of Transfiguration, or the women's terror at the empty tomb on Easter morning. This is the fear John felt when he saw Jesus in His heavenly glory and power:

[Slide 13]*Revelation 1:17 NIV*

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

It is the fear a human being feels when in the presence of Almighty God. It is not merely the instant of terror we experience when our amygdala hits the panic button. It is an awe that goes to the very center of our being. It is what biblical writers called "The fear of the LORD."

The Eye of the Storm:**[Slide 14]**

It's a strange thing: This mighty fear – the fear of the LORD – has the power to inoculate us from the lesser terrors of our world. It's not a fear response that dilates our pupils and freezes our brains. It is instead a deep recognition that we are not *in charge*. We are the creation of Someone infinitely more powerful, more pure and good, more loving and merciful than ourselves.

This is Who was sleeping in the boat that night. He is the Eye of the Storm. He is present in *your* boat right now. If He seems to be disengaged, taking a nap, unconcerned about the storm you are facing, don't be fooled. He is showing you another way – the path of Faith. He is inviting you into another place – the place where your Hidden Life is to be found.

And when He speaks, the storm will lose its force. The snakes and spiders, the blood tests and cat scans, and all the things that go bump in the night, will yield to His command. All He asks of you and me is that we choose the **High Road** of faith, and fear Him alone.