

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Watertown, WI**

**“Why Do Miracles Cause Fear?”**

Rev. David K. Groth

Dec. 1, 2021

“And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, ‘What then will this child be?’ For the hand of the Lord was with him (Lk. 1:65-66).

Did you notice the curious thing going on in our text? John’s birth actually causes fear in the community. Verse 65 says, “And fear came on all their neighbors.” Joy makes sense at the birth of a baby. A baby shower makes sense. But why the fear? What’s going on?

Well, we know John’s birth was a miracle, right? John’s father and mother, Zechariah and Elizabeth, are very old, well past the time of conceiving children. So, the birth of John is a miracle and in the Bible miracles often cause fear.

In Luke chapter 7, as Jesus enters the town of Nain, He bumps into a funeral procession of a young man whose mother was a widow. When Jesus saw this woman, He had compassion on her. Her future was precarious. Her husband was already dead, and now her only son has died. As a woman, she could not work and the government would be of no help to her. The death of her son could put her on the streets as a beggar. To those who were grieving, it’s all a shame, but it’s the predictable order of things. But then Jesus interrupts the funeral procession, touches the stretcher on which the dead man is laying, and says, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And immediately the dead man sits up and begins to speak. The reaction of the people? Fear. “Fear seized them all.” The miracle strikes fear in the people.

It happens again in Mark 4. Crossing the lake at night was His idea, which was usually something to avoid. Sure enough, a furious windstorm breaks out and the waves start crashing into the boat. One more big wave could be enough to send her to the bottom, along with everyone on board. So, they shake Jesus awake and yell at him, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are perishing?” He gets up and rebukes the wind and the waves and says, “Quiet! Be still!” Of course, the wind and the waves have no choice but to obey their master, and, immediately, everything turns calm. Then Jesus looks at his disciples and asks them, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” The very next verse? “And they were terrified” no longer by the wind and the waves (because all is calm), no longer by the prospect of drowning. They were terrified by the miracle and the one who did it. “Who is this” they ask, “that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

Or consider the miracle when Jesus healed the man who was paralyzed. He said to him, “‘Rise, pick up your bed and go home.’” And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, “they were afraid” (Mt. 9:2-8).

So, why do miracles elicit fear? First, miracles teach us we are not in control; God is. Miracles shatter the notion that things always work according to the known laws of nature. God can break the laws of nature if He wants to, and when He does, it causes fear.

Remember the sin of Adam and Eve? They wanted to be like God. They wanted to be in control of their own lives, in control of everything. We rather like being in control too, and often we fall for the illusion that we **are** in control. After all, we have all this knowledge and technology. At the press of the button, we can turn on the oven or turn up the heat in the house or Facetime with someone on the other side of the world. Technology helps us control so much of our environments.

But control is an illusion. A microscopic virus can upset the whole apple cart. So too a few cancer cells floating about in the body looking for a new place to roost. Black ice on the road, or a stolen identity . . . any number of things can make us feel out of control. When we feel out of control, we also feel fear.

Control is an illusion. We don't have the control we assume we do. Miracles also remind us of that, and that causes fear.

Second, miracles come from God, and so they remind us God exists. Because God exists, we are accountable to Him. We have to answer to Him. That also causes fear. No one really likes being accountable to anyone, least of all to God. We don't like the idea of having to answer to anyone for our thoughts, words or actions. We like to do our own thing. We like freedom and independence. We don't like the idea of God judging us.

Atheists have a clever solution. They simply say God doesn't exist. If God doesn't exist, then he cannot judge us. If God doesn't exist, then we are no longer accountable to him. They are absolutely wrong, but atheists believe they can do whatever they want to, because they don't have to answer to God.

Agnostics have a little different approach. Agnostics acknowledge that God may exist, but they insist we cannot know him. He's too otherworldly. His wisdom is too high; it is beyond us. And besides, God doesn't bother to get His hands dirty with all our earthly problems. See how they've fixed the problem of accountability? So long as we cannot know God, then we cannot know what he expects of us, what His commandments are. And if we cannot know what God expects of us, then we are no longer accountable to Him. How very convenient! For the agnostic ignorance turns out to be bliss. Like atheists, agnostics are absolutely wrong, but they believe this ignorance frees them from being accountable to God.

For us as Christians, it's all very, very different. We know God is in control of all things. After all, He's the maker of heaven and earth. We also know having God in control is not something to fear but to celebrate, because God has made Himself known to us in Jesus. He loves us. We don't need to be afraid of a God who loves us, right? Jesus made that very clear. The miracles He did, whether healing the sick or calming the storm or raising the dead, the miracles He did harmed no one. They helped people. His miracles teach us the Lord loves us and has good plans for us.

The cross teaches the same. Any God who lays down His life for us on a cross doesn't hate us, or merely tolerate our existence. He loves us. So, as Christians, we are very glad God has complete control.

Admittedly, sometimes God's will for us can be scary. It can include any number of things we would never choose for ourselves, such as illness and injury and disappointment at work or with friends. But because we know He loves us, everything that happens to us is first filtered through His love. So, His will for us is good. That's why we pray "Thy will be done." In fact, His will is exactly what we would want for our lives, if only we knew all the details.

As Christians, we also welcome being *accountable* to Him. We know God, because we know Jesus. We know God doesn't want to punish us forever, because we know Jesus died on the cross for our sin and for our forgiveness. God has appointed Himself to be accountable for us. We fail every day to live up to His expectations. We break His commandments every day. But He has taken on the responsibility for our sin. He has answered for our sin. On the cross, He suffered our punishment. Clearly His will is to save us from all those other forces that would control us if only they could, such as sin, death, and the devil. Through His death and resurrection Jesus has wrestled control away from those forces. The devil cannot enslave us against the will of God, and everlasting death is not our fate. Through Christ, our citizenship is in heaven.

When Jesus rose from the dead that miracle scared people half to death. But it's the best news ever because it means He's the victor over sin and death and the devil.

So, to summarize miracles cause fear because they remind us, we are not in control, God is. But as Christians, we don't fear that. We can entrust ourselves to His care, His control, because we know He loves us.

Secondly, miracles also cause fear because they remind us God exists and we are accountable to Him. But as Christians we don't fear that either because, in Christ, God has also made Himself responsible for us, for our sin, and for our salvation. He has forgiven and saved us.

So, we have no reason to fear that God is in control of all things. We have no reason to fear that we are accountable to God. For we know Jesus loves us. Thanks be to God. Amen.