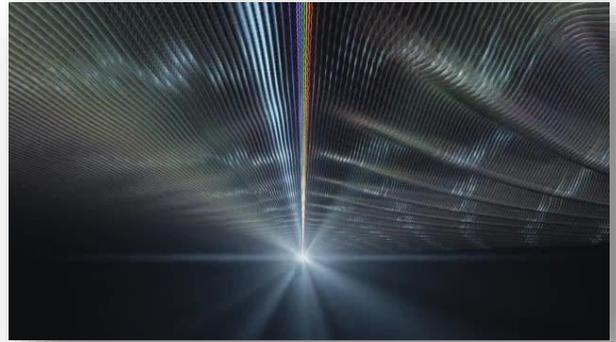


## Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

March 24, 2020

It was Thursday, June 1, 2000. As I had my devotional time that morning, sitting in the swing on our screened-in porch, I read the prescribed passage for the day, which was Mark's record of Jesus stilling the storm. As I read the story, my thoughts were arrested by the last verse: "**Who is this man**, that even the wind and waves obey him?" (Mark 4:41).



Later that day, I went to lunch with Gene Patton, our church Building Manager, who worked for me, and Dr. Ron Oliver, the Chair of our Building & Grounds Committee, for whom I worked, and in that conversation Gene told us that for several months he had noticed that the light at the top of the stair to the men's baptistry robing area was on every morning when he opened the building. This light was on even when Gene knew he had been the last person out of the building the night before and had been the first person in the next morning . . . and the light had not been on when he secured the building.

Due to a previous catastrophic fire, the campus was outfitted with motion detectors all over the place, and there was one by that door, so no one could have moved about that area during the night without the three of us having been awakened by ADT. When Gene mentioned the light, I remembered that I had also noticed that light being on when I opened the campus on Sunday mornings during the past several months, but I hadn't thought much about it.

The story got more interesting. About a month prior to this conversation, Midge Denton and Virginia Mardis of our building staff had been cleaning and restocking the men's and women's robing areas. Midge had been working on the women's side of the baptistry, and Virginia had been on the men's side, where this light was.



Suddenly, Virginia gave a blood-curdling scream, and Midge dashed around the baptistry ledge to see what was happening. As Midge opened the door, she saw Virginia running toward her, and she could see a female figure in dark clothing standing behind Virginia. But then, suddenly, the figure vanished.

A week or two passed. (It continues to amaze me that Midge and Virginia hadn't quit on the spot.) Gene, Midge and Virginia were working in the large foyer area in front of the sanctuary when they simultaneously became aware of a presence behind them. When they turned around, the same figure was standing silently looking at them, dressed in a dark, hooded garment.

The figure turned and went up the skywalk to the balcony, with Gene close behind her. There are three exits from the top landing of the skywalk. When Gene reached the landing, only seconds behind the hooded figure, she was gone . . . and all three doors were locked.

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I puzzled over these events as I drove back to the church. Our family had joined the church some years before on the Sunday that the building was dedicated, and as the Church Administrator (among other things), I knew just about everything that had ever happened in that building. I'm not really into ghosts, the paranormal, or psychic phenomena, but I had the strong impression that a spiritual confrontation was called for.

Not wanting to be thought crazy, I didn't tell anyone what I was about to do. I went over to the sanctuary and up to the baptistry area, which was about as remote as one could be from the office areas of the campus. I was more than a little afraid.

As I ascended the stairs, I remembered Paul's words about spiritual warfare: *"In every battle you will need faith as your shield to stop the fiery arrows aimed at you by Satan. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"* (Ephesians 6:16-17).

And I remembered John's guidelines for testing the spirits: *"This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world"* (1 John 4:2-3).

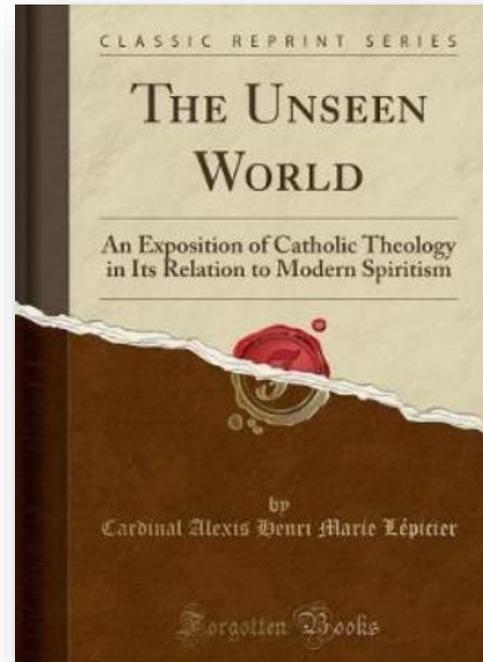
As I walked from room to room in the baptistry area, I said aloud (because that helped me to feel a little less afraid), "If there is a spirit here, and if you acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, and if you have a message for me, I am ready to hear it, and I will obey you. **But if not**, then I banish you forever from this holy place by the power of the blood of Christ. This is a holy place, and you have no place here." I told no one what I had done.

The next morning, I asked Gene, "Was the light on this morning?" "No," he said. And it has never been on in that mysterious way again, nor has the shadowy figure been seen any more.

This was all awesome enough, but several weeks later I told Paul Fruits, a good friend in another state, about this experience. When I told Paul about having begun the day in meditation on *"Who is this man, that even the wind and the waves obey him,"* he became very quiet. "What day was that?" he asked.

Since the luncheon appointment was on my calendar, I looked and told Paul that this had happened on June 1<sup>st</sup>. Paul took a deep breath and said, "In my devotions that same morning, God took me to that very verse, and the Spirit told me to pray earnestly for you, because you were in great danger."

I've had several other "exorcism" experiences, some fairly recent, and all pretty intense, but none so remarkable as this one. As it has been said, "The universe is a far stranger place than we have imagined."



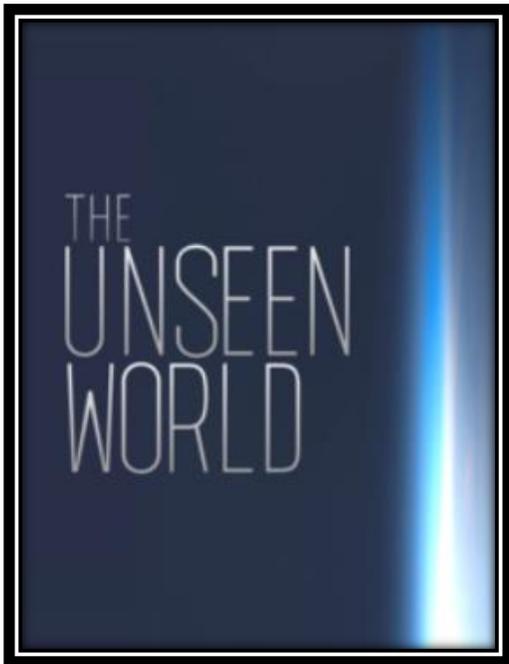
So why tell this story to you today? Well, partly because I was reminded of it by an email I forwarded to most of you earlier today, and partly because it fits the kind of situation in which we currently find ourselves. I invite your attention to Matthew 14:22-33. Like Mark 4, this is a seafaring story, a story about the Sea of Galilee, a story about terror in the deep.

It had been quite a day. Early in the day, Jesus had learned that His cousin, John the Baptist, had been beheaded by King Herod. This event was heavy on Jesus' heart, not only because of grief, but because this violence raised the level of danger involved in His own ministry. We're told that "As soon as Jesus heard the news, he went off by himself in a boat to a remote area to be alone" (Matthew 14:13).

Somehow, though, word got out about that part of the shoreline toward which Jesus was heading, and huge crowds gathered there, removing any possibility of solitude. So, instead of spending the day alone with His Father, Jesus spent the day teaching and healing, and as evening came, the people were hungry. Using a small boy's lunch (John 6:8), Jesus miraculously fed dinner to 5,000 men and their families. We pick up the story in verse 22:

*"Immediately after this, Jesus made his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake while he sent the people home. Afterward he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone. Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves.*

*"About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came to them, **walking on the water**. When the disciples saw him, they screamed in terror, thinking he was a ghost. But Jesus spoke to them at once. 'It's all right,' he said. 'I am here! Don't be afraid.'*



*"Then Peter called to him, 'Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you by walking on water.'*

*"All right, come,' Jesus said.*

*"So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when he looked around at the high waves, he was terrified and began to sink. 'Save me, Lord!' he shouted.*

*"Instantly Jesus reached out his hand and grabbed him. 'You don't have much faith,' Jesus said. 'Why did you doubt me?' And when they climbed back into the boat, the wind stopped.*

*"Then the disciples worshiped him. '**You really are the Son of God!**' they exclaimed" (Matthew 14:22-33).*

I'd like to think about this event and about my experience in Louisville using three words: FEAR; FOCUS; and POWER.

**The Disciples.** The disciples had just seen convincing evidence of Jesus' amazing power over Creation as they watched a small lunch replicate itself several thousand times. But on their journey back across the Sea of Galilee they also found themselves in very real danger of losing their battle against that same Creation's power as a frightening storm threatened to sink their boat.

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The disciples were afraid of the storm, but they screamed in terror when in the darkest hours of the night they saw someone walking toward them on the surface of the water. They thought it was an evil spirit who had come to destroy them.

Now it nearly always happens that when persons in the Bible are aware of encountering spirit beings such as angels—or when they experience evidences of the Beyond in Jesus—the first thing that has to be said is “Don’t be afraid.” So it was with the disciples in this midnight encounter.

When Peter knew that the figure on the Sea was Jesus, he boldly asked Jesus to allow him to walk on the water also, which Jesus invited him to do. Peter’s adventure went very well . . . until he took his eyes off of Jesus and began to focus on the danger rather than on the Savior.

After Jesus’ power allowed Peter to walk on the water, saved him from drowning, and stilled the fearsome storm, the disciples exclaimed, “*You really are the Son of God!*” (Matthew 14:33). *Fear. Focus. Power.*

**The Baptistry Spirit.** Like the disciples after the feeding of the 5,000, I had begun June 1, 2000 with an unusual awareness of Jesus’ awesome power, the incredible power of the Creator, robed in human flesh. But like the disciples, a few hours later I found myself in the middle of a spiritual storm, engaged in warfare with a mysterious spirit, and very much afraid. By God’s grace, I was able to stay focused on the power and protection of Jesus by reminding myself that “*the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world*” (1 John 4:4). It was only by the power of Jesus that the evil spirit was cast out of our church. *Fear. Focus. Power.*

**Your Life.** Finally, how might all this apply to your own life as you read this? Because of COVID-19 most of us are facing “giants,” “storms,” decisions, and uncertainties that fill us with fear. We find ourselves adrift on a stormy spiritual sea. The water is deep and the waves are high, and fear is never far from our awareness.

My friend, as He reached out to Peter long ago, Jesus reaches out to you today, saying, **“Keep your eyes on me. Having faith means trusting me in spite of your circumstances, and watching the circumstances change.** My *power* is best demonstrated through your *weakness*. Move through your FEAR with FOCUS, and you will experience my POWER. And then you will find that you have **NO FEAR.**”

Dave



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