

July 25, 2021

“Rooted in Love not Fear”

Scripture Readings

Ephesians 3:14-21

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

John 6:16-21

When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

Sermon

“Rooted in Love not Fear”

Hear this again and let the words take hold of your heart:

“May you be strengthened in your inner being with power through God’s Spirit, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love”.

Do you ever listen to the world around you, overhear heated conversations, watch the news, witness people’s behavior on the road, at a school board meeting or in congress and think to yourself, “man this world is messed up”.

In the media there is so much negativity. You wouldn't know that we are a nation in which 65% of our citizens identify Christian by all the judgyness, the hatefulness, and the verbal and physical bullying that goes on by adults and children just emulating their elders.

We are a nation gripped by fear and those fears continue to be manufactured and exploited by politicians, by media, and religious folks. Fear-mongering, made up misinformation is funded by racists, alt-left, alt-right, by the assault weapons manufacturers, by climate change deniers and believers, by a myriad of people of all political, ideological or religious persuasions who just want to keep us afraid.

You can change the channel, but all you do is get a different opinion about who the enemy is, and who it is we need to be afraid of. Not to mention some countries who would love to see us destroy ourselves from the inside out so they put up inflammatory, misinformation on social media specifically targeted to further the ever widening divide between the right and the left. Why go to war when they are going to destroy themselves? We are a society that has become rooted and grounded in fear not love.

Now I'm not going to say that all we have to fear is fear itself because there are some pretty scary problems, some clear and present dangers that we have to address. But fear in and of itself isn't a problem because we were created to be aware and respond to the threats around us in order to survive.

But fear is a primitive emotion and when that fear is triggered we get a hit of adrenaline, cortisol, endorphins and dopamine, very powerful chemicals meant to put us into action and ready us for battle. When that fear is triggered we pull into ourselves out of protection and become more self-centered and our tribal instincts kick in. Just us, and everyone else is a threat.

For this very reason our bodies and minds can become addicted to fear. This my friends is the problem. Because you see, if someone is addicted to fear and those chemicals clear their system, the same chemicals that heroin and other drugs imitate, when those chemicals are gone, what do they do?

They turn on another podcast, they fire up cable news, they get on the facebook page of someone who fuels their fear and satisfies their cravings for more poison, giving their body what it has fooled them into thinking it needs. This is just our basic biochemistry.

This addiction to fear is the greatest threat to ourselves and our world, because get this, in order to respond to fear the mind shuts down the prefrontal cortex, or the rational, thinking part of our brains.

In other words, when we are consumed by fear, we stop thinking and when we stop thinking, we are a society that is easily controlled and easily manipulated. We are putty in the hands of those who are doling out the fear like candy. All the sudden some guy in a basement with an opinion and a computer has more influence in our lives than a scientist or an expert who has dedicated themselves to studying our problems and finding solutions.

When we are fearful the part of our brain that is able to distinguish lies from truth, the part of our brain that is capable of creativity, the solution finding part, the relational, the empathetic, and compromising part, is completely hijacked by our primitive brain that has been fooled into thinking it is under attack.

Now some people live in fear because of anxiety disorders, those systems malfunction on a biological level and that is something that might need medical and psychological intervention and certainly deserves our compassion.

And others may have been raised in a fearful environment so they don't even notice that they are living in fear all the time, they get frozen in a state of hyper-vigilance, defensively expecting the worst from others and the world around them because fear is all they have known. They too are deserving of our compassion.

But what I'm talking about today is manufactured fear, how we respond to it when it is being stoked by skilled media, manipulators and malcontents.

Now before you guys start thinking this was a lecture on biochemistry let's get back to the scriptures because they actually gave us some pretty meaningful guidance this morning on how to deal with fear, real or manufactured. Fear not or be not afraid is written in our bible 365 times. A scripture for every single day of the year. And this morning's readings are right on point.

Now, you all know that I don't think the story of Jesus walking on water is a historical fact, but I sure do believe there is much truth in this tale.

We have all been those disciples hunkered down in the boat, terrified and lost and God has found us and comforted us saying "be not afraid, every little things going to be alright." I love

the idea that Jesus came to the disciples, a symbol that God meets us where we are and that can often be huddled and afraid.

I like this story more than the other storm stories in the bible because it's more consistent with my experience of God. In this story Jesus doesn't magically calm the storm, but gets into the boat with us in the middle of that storm and guides us to the other side.

Any of you that have suffered medically or emotionally, you know what I mean, the miracle that we get is that God is with us. God has entered into that storm with us, pulled us close and whispered "be not afraid my child, I am with you".

The letter to the Ephesians holds just such promise too. Next time you feel really fearful, whether it be after watching the news or just from all those fears we all carry around with us everyday, pray something like this:

O Holy One, strengthen my inner being and root me and ground me in Love. When we are full of God's Spirit there is no room for all that fear. When we are grounded in love there is no room for any hate. I think it was Annie Lamont that wrote that *"we all have fears, but courage is just fear that has said its prayers."*

Next time you feel yourself getting pulled into that fear contemplate instead this passage, contemplate the breadth and length and height of God's love that surpasses all knowledge. Let God's love fill you and expand your own capacity to love way beyond what your fearful mind thinks you are capable of. Let God's presence sooth you with each deep breath. I promise you it will help.

Then and only then when we clear our minds of all that toxicity, then we can creatively find solutions, come together, compromise, and empathize with one another again. Then we can model the peace of God, that makes others turn away from the TV and look up at us and think, "Hmm, I'd rather have that kind of peace, than all this noise, I'd rather live in hope and courage rather than fear and hate". Then you will be the one crawling in the boat with others and saying "be not afraid, the shore is that way."

I know I make it sound simple and it isn't. We all can have so many fears at once. Fear of rejection, or heartbreak, or failure, or fear that someone will see beyond our mask and not like us anymore, fear for our families and friends.

We don't need to make up any problems. We don't need people trying to convince us of their latest conspiracy theory, or that someone is going to take what's ours. We don't need to fear entire groups of people, we just need to take people one at a time and have the courage to see God in them. Have the courage to love them in their fear and show them the way to the other side. Let's all continue to play a little part in healing this mess shall we? AMEN

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