

Sermon – August 07, 2022

32 ‘Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions, and give to the poor... 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

This morning we will focus on 2 things: our fears and our treasures.

Let’s discuss ‘fear’ first. If we are **honest** and have some awareness of ourselves, we will admit that we have many different fears every day of our lives. The Rev. Dr. Greg Rickel, rector of St. James Episcopal Church in Austin, Texas writes of his experience as a listening priest:

“Of all of the various expressed emotions, one seems to be at the root of so much that we live with and struggle with in this life. That emotion is fear.”

‘Fear’ is mentioned frequently in the Bible.

Fear is often not expressed when someone is speaking. Fear is often covered by bravado or ignored, the spectre whose presence is **denied**. We learn to hide it well. It may even be unacknowledged by the person experiencing it. And yet it is there, in so many situations, so many times a day. Fear.

Where does fear come from? Why are we afraid? Often we fear the unknown. When we face uncertainty, a new situation, an outcome which cannot be predicted, we become anxious and fearful; we are out of our comfort zone which can be downright painful.

If we ask the question “What are you afraid of?” it uncovers an important aspect of our lives we would rather not think about. It uncovers areas where we feel paralyzed, frozen and unable to function; areas where we have lost control. Many of our decisions are based on this emotion of fear. But it is not very rational, nor a trustworthy emotion. Yet to be able to identify what we fear tells us much. It tells us what has power over us.

Louis Pasteur is reported to have had such an irrational fear of dirt and infection he refused to shake hands. President and Mrs. Benjamin Harrison were so intimidated by the newfangled electricity installed in the White House they didn't dare **touch** the switches. If there were no servants around to turn off the lights when the Harrisons went to bed, they slept with them on!

WE can chuckle at the Harrisons' fear of electricity now, but today we have fears which are just as irrational. Some of us heights, spiders and snakes. As children, we had fears some of which we outgrew. I used to think a big black hand would come out from under my bed at night, so was afraid to put my feet on the floor. I used to be afraid of the dentist and bit his finger once. I feared starting school every year intensely. Fears persist into adulthood. We fear people, we fear people who are passionate about ideas which are different from our own, we fear anger and criticism, we fear death, we even fear love or closeness. We fear being abandoned. We fear what is unfamiliar, we fear what we cannot change and then we also fear change itself.

And yet, Jesus, in the Gospel today tells his little flock not to be afraid, that it is God's good pleasure to give them the kingdom. In fact, the phrase 'Do not be afraid.' occurs at least 67 times in the Bible. The words "Do not fear." also occur that many times. Fear comes up in the Bible again and again because it is so much a part of being human. It seems God understands and wants to reassure us and to calm our fears.

It is likely that Jesus said 'Do not be afraid.' precisely because he knew the little flock **would** be afraid. He knew that he had to name that fear first, so that named and acknowledged, the fear could be dealt with. He knew his followers would be afraid of falling short if they considered where their real treasure was. We are afraid today. He knew they would be afraid of Jesus' proposal to sell their possessions and to give to the poor. We are today. They understood scarcity. We do too. They were afraid of abundance, it was strange; and to us it is as well. They could not grasp how God's pleasure is giving them a kingdom and neither can we.

Jesus seems to say "I'll give you the kingdom, but you must give me everything else." Did he mean lay it all down and walk away? Well, in some instances yes, like St Francis and Mother Teresa, yes. But for all of us, most likely no. 'Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also', is about **rearranging priorities**. It is about where Jesus, the Christ is in our priorities. That is something we are afraid of looking at seriously. Do we fear that in our hearts, Christ and his kingdom do not come first? It seems to me that the truth is that Jesus is the treasure and the key to true riches. Jesus is the treasure.

Sometimes our fears can teach us what it is we idolize, what it is that has such power over us that it competes with our Lord for first place. Some say materialism is an idolatry woven right into the fabric of our society. WE live like kings

compared to most others in the world, but our appetite for more is insatiable. Or perhaps what really preoccupies us is our health, our career, our relationships, our homes, our television or computers, even our families? Once we know, we can begin to shake ourselves free from our idols, so we can be free to live in Christ as Christ created us to live.

There is a very gentle exercise suggested by the Irish Jesuits. It is to think of the persons, places, occupations, memories, ambitions which really draw us. We are to then take up each of these things which draw us; picture it, savour its sweetness; and to each say with tenderness:

You are precious to me, but you are not my life. You finish by saying “*Lord, everything you made is good; but you are best of all.*” Yes, “**Lord, everything** you made is good; but **you** are best of all.”

Jesus says “Sell your possessions, and give alms.” The Greek word “alms” is related to the word, *eleeo*, which means “to be gracious” or “to show mercy” or “to feel sympathy”. Giving alms usually means giving money, but at a deeper level it has to do with providing what is needed — money — food — a helping hand — a listening ear. There are many needy people, and many kinds of needs.

“The Christian community cannot contemplate discipleship apart from considering how it will serve the poor and less fortunate. It lies at the heart of faithfulness”

I will end this morning with a little story of one woman’s experience of freedom. A lady in a parish knew she was dying. She didn't really know what to do with her finances, furniture, car and other personal property because her children did not want them or need them. She decided to start giving her personal effects away to friends and neighbors, a little at a time. She asked her friends to drop by and while they were there, they were to either take an item home with them, or mark it for their own after this lady's death. Her house was emptying out fairly fast, because she had a lot of friends. The rest was earmarked for the local charity thrift shop. She started earmarking her investments, too: 6 to the Church, one to the Cancer Society, one to a scholarship at the High School. She spent the last few months of her life with little, but with a sense of readiness, and she spent her time thinking not about her things, but about God's blessings. She was an amazing woman. No doubt she had had fears to face and idols whose power over her she had to escape. But she got to the point where she knew what was really important, what was really her treasure; and how she disposed of all her things at the ending to her life demonstrated the words

“Lord, everything you made is good; but you are best of all.”

If we really believe that the fullness of life we long for is found in union with Jesus, we will direct our whole lives toward acquiring that union. If we really believe Jesus is the way to the fullness of life, we will have many reasons for giving things away.

When you clean your house... clean it as if God were going to be your special guest. Because He is.

When you prepare a meal... prepare it as if God were going to be sitting at your table. Because He is.

When you work... work as if God will be your customer. Because He is.

And when you speak with another... speak as if you were speaking with God. Because you are. Author Unknown Amen

A few years ago billionaires Warren Buffett and Bill Gates announced that 38 fellow billionaires will join them in giving away at least half of their fortunes to charity -- certainly this is a dramatic example of rearranging priorities. And it promises to give a huge boost to the world of philanthropy.

Buffett, chairman and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, announced in 2006 that he'd be donating 99% of his earnings to good causes.

He told the [BBC](#) at the time "I am not an enthusiast of dynastic wealth, particularly when the alternative is six billion people with much poorer hands in life than we have, having a chance to benefit from the money,"

Bill Gates, who co-founded Microsoft with Paul Allen (another of the 38 pledgers) has devoted the last decade to running the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation with his wife. With an endowment of \$33.5 billion, it's the largest and most powerful private foundation in the world.

"At its core, the Giving Pledge is about asking wealthy families to have important conversations about their wealth and how it will be used," Buffett said during the announcement. "We're delighted that so many people are doing just that -- and that so many have decided to not only take this pledge but also to commit to sums far greater than the 50% minimum level."