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Be Thou Not Afraid

By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

[Jesus said,] "Fear no one." [Matthew 10:26]

Recently, I attended a memorial mass for a man who passed away about four years ago here in France. He was in a group that did Gregorian chant. The memorial service took place in a twelfth-century chapel where he is buried, and the mass, not surprisingly was Gregorian. The mass with the chant was beautiful, spirit-filled and quite moving, especially given the great acoustics in this chapel, but what I found the most powerful was the priest's sermon. It seemed to speak directly to me, even though it was in French. The phrase he kept on repeating was "pas de peur", which means "without fear" or "no fear." It struck me how much of what we do in life is affected by fear.

Fear is a very important emotion. It is not something one should dismiss cavalierly. Fear is our built-in warning system that something may harm us. And, in this sense, it is a good emotion to feel. But fear can be unreasonable or overblown. If it is unreasonable, it can be classified as a phobia. If it is overblown, it can be classified as anxiety or hypochondria. Additionally, humans are very smart; people have learned how to "whip up" fear in others in order to control and manipulate them. All one has to do is look at what the news media has done for the last

five years to see how fear can be used as a weapon.

Fear has been used by conservative media and liberal media alike. It has been used by conservative politicians and liberal politicians alike. And fear has been used by individuals on social media as well. In other words, it is an effective tool to control the population. And let's face it, media is a big business. It is a method to sell advertisement. Keeping people in a constant state of agitation and fear is an effective method for keeping people tuned in to "your" news media. And it works.

Because fear is a natural method for self-preservation in humans, we all have it. But because it can also be easily manipulated in people, it can be quite dangerous. So, what do we as Christians do with this two-edged sword?

In our Gospel Lesson for June 25, we have Christ's warning to us about fear:

[Jesus said to the Twelve,] "Fear no one." [Matthew 10:26a New American Bible translation]

"Fear them not." [Matthew 10:26a King James Version translation]

As you can see, the New American Bible's translation is

The Convocation of the West Summary Statement

We are a missionary people living out the historical, Biblical Christian faith in the Anglican tradition.



more broad, whereas the Authorized Version is more specific. But the message to the twelve Apostles is the same: “Do not fear”. Put your fears aside, whether it is the fear of the unknown because you are not taking anything with you on your missionary journey (previous section of Chapter 10), or it is the fear of how someone may physically harm you (following verses of Chapter 10). Regardless of the source of fear, one must learn to overcome it and trust the Lord.

There was a movie called “Defending Your Life”. It came out in 1991 and starred Albert Brooks and Meryl Streep. Even though it was a good comedy, theologically, it was a disaster. The concept is, before people are reincarnated, they needed to defend their life in a heavenly court of law. The people who lived fearless lives moved on to a “higher plain”. Those who let fear rule their lives, did not. The one kernel of truth from the movie (besides that love transcends) that I thought was truly worth remembering is this: fear destroys. The goal for all of us is how to live our lives where fear is controlled and does not rule us.

But how do we live our lives in such a way that fear does not control us? How do we live our lives so that we control our fears? The answer is in trusting the Lord. Jonah dreaded and feared going to Nineveh because he did not trust the Lord. Once he did go, he was shocked by the outcome. Jeremiah was told by the Lord that no one would believe him, but that Jeremiah still had to proclaim what the Lord was telling him to say. The list goes on with people from the Bible who did or did not trust the Lord. The outcome was not always good for either group, but those who trusted in the Lord were able to face their persecutors while still maintaining their faith. They did not compromise. And as a result they entered the Communion of Saints.

Jesus wanted His Apostles to realize the same thing, namely that they needed to trust the Lord and that fear must be put in its proper place. He said to the twelve:

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.” [Matthew 10:28 New American Bible translation]

The only one who can kill both body and soul is God. So, “Fear no one but God” is the message of this passage.

The early Christians took this message to heart. When fear of persecution became rife for justifiable reasons, the early Christians worshipped in the catacombs. They did NOT stop worshipping; they tried to worship in a location that provided some shelter and protection. When a plague was decimating the population of the Roman world, the pagans went into hiding and quarantine. The Christians, knowing the danger, went out to treat the sick. In both cases, the early Christian had to overcome their fears, but they also did things in a wise way

without compromising their faith.

“Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father.” [Matthew 10:32-33 New American Bible translation]

The message is clear: as Christians, we are to rise above our fears so that we can make wise decisions. We are not forbidden to act in a way that is self-preserving, but we are not to act this way IF it compromises our faith. Preserving the faith sometimes takes preserving ourselves, but we are never to do so IF it means denying Christ.

However, please also remember, the key in all of this, besides trusting the Lord, is love. The early Christians who went out to help and comfort the sick were risking their lives. If they did not do this, would it have been a denial of Christ? Probably not; however, being a Christian means rising above our fears

and loving others. The action of these early Christian, risking their lives to treat those with the plague was a profession of faith. And many historians believe these selfless, fearless acts helped end a persecution that was going on at that time in the Roman Empire.

Many of us traditional Anglicans are feeling anxious right now. We in the Missionary Diocese of All Saints are in the process of electing a new Bishop Coadjutor. Things have happened in the Anglican Communion and GAFCON, which

have called into question whether any organization can work. And then there are the troubles befalling the ACNA.

Additionally, there are the different authors and Christian pundits that create a sense of fear – fear that the persecution of Christians will come back; fear of AI; fear of a totally alien world compared to what we know now. But these hypotheses and theories all seem to do little but stir up our fears. But these are just distractions.

It is time that we Christians rise above our fears. We need to trust the Lord; we need to spread the Gospel; and we need to baptize people in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Above all, we need to be a witness of God’s great Love. And we need not be distracted by a world bent on keeping us timid with fear. If we do this while constantly maintaining and witnessing to our faith in Jesus Christ, it is my firm belief that we will be surprised how many people will come to the Lord.

So, fear not Christians. Love the Lord, Christians. And trust the Lord, Christians. Let us not worry about what others think or what might happen. Let’s just concentrate on being good and fearless Christians and let the Lord take care of the rest.

Amen and God bless.



Albert Brooks and Meryl Streep in "Defending Your Life"
Warner Bros.



Caring Together

By The Right Rev. Winfield Mott

“Tell it to somebody who cares.”

Sadly, that could be the motto for many. If an activity does not give swift gratification or make a profit, many people lose interest.

It may be worth noting in this context that we are living in a radical sociological experiment today, one which seems to evoke little comment, although it has changed dramatically how people live. Two centuries ago, 1823, to pick one moment in time, the great majority of people dwelled in small rural communities, and lived primarily by farming or in providing services or goods to farmers. The food they consumed was mostly what they or their neighbors raised. They lived with, or near, extended family. Family or not, they knew virtually everybody in their town. Few traveled beyond the local area. Those who did, did so slowly, by horse or sailboat. The church community was simply a segment of the whole community. Often a single parish served the whole town. Cities were tiny by today's standards, and industries mostly small. Caring was built in. Extended families saw a responsibility to care for their members, lifelong neighbors looked after each other.

The planet's human population has grown at least eightfold in the intervening time between then and now. Mobility and emigration, industrialization and urbanization, means few people live by farming today. Most people live in tiny nuclear families in big urban clusters, surrounded by strangers and with little commitment to any sort of community. Whatever community exists is as likely to be global through technology, as local through neighborhood. Travel now is common and, at least in theory, swift.

The collateral damage in all this is still unfolding, but it already seriously impacts much of life. One of the greatest hits has been on how people care.

All this simply restates historical trends of the past several centuries in terms of how people care about others. It is relevant to us as Christians, because caring is at the core of our

Christian faith and life. Christianity is uniquely a way of life in community, “where two or three are gathered in my [i.e. Jesus'] name” (Matthew 18:20). And the second of God's two great Commandments is to love our neighbor, who Jesus interprets (in the parable of the Good Samaritan) as being everybody.

But caring is no longer a self-evident exercise of doing the obvious for those village family and neighbors in need, including caring for strangers who arrived in your community as well. It was, in fact, the Church community which traditionally offered hospitality to travelers and strangers. Monastic communities saw themselves as required by their rule to provide food and shelter to all who came to their door, and hospitals (note the word relates to “hospitality”) were operated by the Church.

The mandate to care for others, as expressed by Jesus vividly in Matthew 25, among other places, has not changed. It should go without saying that Christians care, without exception, for all. It should, but unfortunately it needs to be said. Church among us is rarely a village parish. In the urban environment, it is a consumer choice. Many churches market themselves as desirable because you will feel good if you attend. Because each one is an enterprise kept solvent through contributions, each has an institutional survival instinct, and a need to keep its “consumers” happy. The urban vestry's motivation for evangelism is the realization that, without growth, the budget will not be met. Parish priests are judged by many of their peers on how well they have “grown” their church and budget. In all this, caring plays little role, especially caring for the needy who cannot contribute much to the numbers.

Jesus in his life and acts cares for his planet and people, enough to offer himself for us on the Cross. Along the way is a parade of incidents expressing his care for individuals through healing them, teaching them, feeding them, leading them. In short, he has manifested his great (and undeserved) love for us by caring, in little and big ways, from salvation to cooking

breakfast for the disciples on the beach (John 21:12-13). Likewise we, as the Body of Christ on earth, are to organize ourselves as a caring community. The primary focus of that community is to gather around his Eucharistic Presence, and then to continue our liturgy in serving and caring for others throughout the week. To worship as the gathered community in the Eucharist and to care for others all the time is one seamless act, not two separate endeavors. "A life of faith...and a love for one's brethren is ...the true worship, without which external worship becomes an empty, indeed, repulsive force" (Joseph Ratzinger, 1967 [later Pope Benedict XVI]).

It is thus not an optional activity added to the parish calendar on occasion. It is at the essential Eucharistic center of the gathered Christian community to care for others. The only questions are those of strategy, finding the best way to express that care.

It begins by understanding that, since Christians are by definition in community with each other and their Lord, care for all in that community is basic. The Christian community, the family of the baptized, is to be treated as family (the ideal family, not the dysfunctional ones we experience). When parishes are too big to know everyone, how can you express care? This is where the needs of love conflict with the needs of an institution. A community smaller than, say, one hundred people, is obvious if you are going to genuinely and individually care about everyone. But institutional churches define their viability by financial success, not by success in love and care. The rector and other staff need incomes reflecting their professional status, and beyond

the parish, the diocese must pay its bishop a salary worthy of his executive status. Buildings and programs must be constructed and maintained.

But Jesus functioned only with love and care. That does not mean it is evil to own buildings or pay the clergy. It is all in the priorities. If love and care are central, permeating the entire community, paid clergy and owned real estate can even be helpful. But be careful, because institutions and those who thrive in them have a way of warping the priorities into institutional self-survival. Love and care become decorative extras, a veneer with no depth. The ministry of Jesus can be lost.

It is important to be specific. A caring community is one where everyone knows each other and where real help is there when needed. A caring community also is one which looks outside of itself. What are the needs of your neighborhood? Equally, what are the needs of those far away? You know the places. Today it is Ukraine, Palestine, South Sudan, the U.S.-Mexican border, Haiti, and more. My personal preference is to locate someone personally and direct all aid through them, so that it reaches the intended recipients, without overhead and misleading information.

There are no contemporary paintings of Jesus. Perhaps that is part of the Divine plan, so we do not know what he looked like. As a result, every face is the face of Jesus, icons of his Presence, as he himself makes clear in Matthew 25. We thus come full circle back to our Eucharistic offering of our selves and our material goods, offered through the poor, oppressed and suffering, to the loving Lord

UPDATE ►► Request for a Bishop Coadjutor

The Standing Committee for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints has opened nominations for our next Bishop Coadjutor. The Search Committee has a website (<http://MDASBISHOP.com>) for such nominations. Since this man will be leading our Diocese in conjunction with our Bishop Ordinary, our other Bishops, our Vicars General and the rest of our Standing Committee, we ask for your prayers that the Holy Spirit will guide us in selecting the right man. I would ask that all our parishes, clergy and laity pray that God will insure the correct man be selected for this very important job in keeping us within the One, True, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. To this end, Fr. Christopher Parrish of St. Luke's Chapel in the Hills has drafted the following prayer, which I hope will help you:

A Prayer for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints' Selection of a New Bishop Coadjutor

Almighty God, giver of every good gift. Look graciously upon Thy Holy Church, and so guide the minds of those who shall choose a Bishop Coadjutor for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints that we may receive a faithful pastor who will preach the Gospel, care for Thy people, equip us for ministry, and lead us forth in fulfillment of the Great Commission: through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God bless,
Fr. Michael Penfield
Vicar General