

Facing our fears

Pastor Sylvia Barrett

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Favorite quote of the week... God never says 'Oops!'

Fear is a response that is **hardwired** into the brain. It evolved to help us protect ourselves from danger. It is a state of the brain. When we feel threatened, by rational or irrational fears, adrenaline is released, which we need to decide one of two actions. Flight or fight. Adrenaline in the bloodstream helps the animal to run away from the danger or face it and fight it off—it provides the animal with the extra energy that is needed for both courses of action. And we all come equipped with a strong instinct for self-preservation.

In humans, the emotion of fear is extended to social situations. So we might feel afraid even when we are not in any **physical** danger. Evolution has co-opted the brain's warning system to help us deal with difficult social situations. The human brain uses the already existing warning system because it includes the release of adrenaline, which provides the extra energy that is needed in dealing with the **stress** associated with the social situation we are in.

Of course, the system sometimes malfunctions, and humans develop **irrational fears**, and the brain kicks into a higher gear, even when there is no stimulus or danger at all. They may develop a fear of the dark, or claustrophobia, arachnophobia or any one of the many other phobias out there. It all dates back to those first cavemen, and the need to survive. We all still have a tiny piece of the caveman in us. Which is why I think some people like to eat their meat very very rare.

FDW famously declared... we have nothing to fear except fear itself. He knew a little about courage himself, battling the effects of polio for most of his life, but refusing to be limited by his disability.

Fear was a major factor in the Old Testament, in a tribal society where survival of the fittest was the order of the day, and in the New Testament when the early church faced an increasing risk of persecution and death, and today fear, hand in hand with all the anxieties brought on by living in a so called civilized society, is also a real threat to our peace of mind, our actions, and our lives.

In a contemporary survey, the wrath of God was one fear only slightly above the most common fear of all... fear of the spouse.

Fear of the Lord however, in the Bible, was a multi layered concept. It was fear, not in the sense of an Alfred Hitchcock or Freddie Kreuger movie, it was fear in the sense of a

complete unknown. Mixed in with respect, awe, and all things sacred. Fear of things totally beyond man's comprehension. In retrospect, quite a healthy fear, if such a thing exists!

Put yourself in someone's shoes back in the time of Moses, or Joshua. The parting of the Red Sea; the falling of the walls of Jericho. Events made all the more fearful, more unsettling because you were dealing with an entity, when even speaking their name was considered dangerous. God, or Jehovah was commonly written as four letters, the Hebrew Tetragrammaton. JHWH. Thunderstorms, tidal waves, crop failures, were all manifestations of God in the Old Testament, that constantly reminded people of the power, the authority and the majesty of God.

Fast forward to this day and because we have weather.com and many helpful Google explanations from Wikapaedia, our knowledge has grown, and our fear of God has receded. Which is a great pity. Because as Solomon wisely said. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.

What are we afraid of as a society?

Chances are government corruption, cyber terrorism, corporate tracking of personal data, terrorist attacks, government tracking of personal data, bio-warfare, identity theft, economic collapse, running out of money, credit card fraud.... And did I mention war, Obamacare, illness, pandemic, nuclear attack, civil unrest and tornados?

The faster technology grows the more information is out there. Social media can invent, slant, bias, and otherwise distort the truth. We have certainly had evidence of this in the past year or so. It's difficult sometimes to even know what the truth is. And because we don't know what to believe, who to trust. We become anxious.

As consumers also we are encouraged to fear, to feel uncertain, to feel incomplete.

Because all the manufacturers out there want you to buy their products, and if you are healthy, you're not going to need them. All I know is that there must be a lot of people out there with toenail fungus, digestive disorders, leaking windows, lacking nutrients, and good car insurance.

The good news is that approximately 80% of the things you worry about, will never happen, but there's still that pesky 20% that need addressing. Because sooner or later, a little rain is going to fall on our parade. Maybe just a light downpour, or maybe a monsoon. And maybe, just maybe there is no flight option available. We have to face our fears, or do what a lot of people do under those circumstances. Put their heads in the sand, and wait for the storm to pass.

And this is literally, where the Good News comes in. Because God, despite society's best efforts to relegated him to the back burner of life, is still in charge.

He still, despite our best efforts to turn our back on him, is faithful to mankind, and the covenant he made with His people from the beginning of time. When we give thanks on

Thursday, before our Thanksgiving meal, look around the table, and realize how much you have already been blessed.

How can we help keep our lives in balance, and anxieties and fears in check?

In our readings today, we heard a famous passage from the Book of Ecclesiastes. For everything there is a season. There is a time. A time of want. A time of plenty. A time of rain. A time of drought. It is the nature of life. The only guarantee we have is today. And even that is not guaranteed, because things happen even in the space of 24 hours that have the capacity to totally turn our lives upside down.

There is a rhythm to life, which is as ancient as the Pyramids, there is what is called the Circadian rhythm, the 24 hour cycle, there is the natural rhythm of tides and seasons. And in our faith, there is also a rhythm, there are seasons, times of plenty and times of want, and if you look back over the challenging times of your life, you will probably discover that it was as a result of those challenging times that your faith matured.

Charles Spurgeon, a Victorian preacher in London, England, said this:

Do not let concerns about yesterday, and anxiety about tomorrow, sap your strength for today. Here. Now. Today. If things are going well. Celebrate. If life is a challenge work through it, trusting that God will be there with you every step of the way.

The letter to the Colossians was written by Paul. In it, he tells the Colossians that the world's teachings are totally empty when compared with God's plan.

Colossians 1:16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities. God trumps them all. Sorry for the pun!

All things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

You don't need superglue, or the latest plastic gizmo or gadget. You need God in your lives. Go looking for God, and you will find him. He is here, today with us. And nothing that we can do, have done, or will do, will make him love us any less or any more than he does right now.

You see, the truth of the matter is, that we need a certain amount of fear, or uncertainty in our lives. Not a lot. Just a little to keep us alert. Keep you focused.

Complacency is not an option when you become a Christian. Because when you make that step forwards into faith, suddenly you have a lot to live up to. You can't play the ignorance card any more. Sorry. I didn't know. **Now you do.**

As a Christian, when we read Scripture, and listen to what Jesus taught his disciples, **we know what is expected of us. And it isn't easy.**

But we also know that God already knows us inside out. And he still loves us. He knows what we have done, what we didn't do, and he still loves us deeply.

We get a glimpse of that paradigm when we as parents deal with a difficult child. We still love them, no matter what. We are connected. Magnify that moment of pain when we are hurt, and the joy we feel when that child turns back to us.

Magnify that moment by infinity, and you have an inkling of how God feels towards us when we get it right, and we get it wrong.

Which is why Paul encouraged his young Christians to live lives that were worthy of the Lord, to produce those fruits of the spirit which are so important to the building up our characters and faith. And that included facing their fears, and putting their hope in God, and in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:13 **We have each and every one of us been rescued from the control of darkness, and transferred into the Kingdom of his Son, Jesus Christ.**

We have been transformed by the power of God. We carry those same genes that have travelled down through the ages through the Old Testament times, the New Testament times, down through almost two thousand years, those genes, that set God apart from man, that elevate him way beyond our human comprehension...so that with fear, and reverence, we can experience the true mystic sense of the communion we share through his Son. **This fear of the Lord**, is far removed from Alfred Hitchcock and Freddy Kreuger, from spiders, snakes and phobias, **It is a rational fear** based on the hard wiring in our brains that says we have a Creator, a God who is to be explored, and marveled at, and when we submit to his authority, **the fear of the Lord becomes in the course of our journey on this earth, a faith that will withstand anything that the natural world, or life, can throw at us.**

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, help us to feel your presence during our times of challenge. Help us to celebrate your presence in our lives, daily. Help us to love and forgive, as you love and forgive us, each time we stumble. In your Son's precious name we pray. Jesus Christ. Amen.