

## Don't Be Afraid

Fear, how can you and I face it? How can you overcome it? "It's impossible!" someone might say. "*There's simply too much to be fearful about in this world so full of anxiety and danger.*"

I was reminded, in reading a meditation about overcoming fear, that during the great depression of the 1930's the new president of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, said in his inaugural address, "*We have nothing to fear, but fear itself*".<sup>1</sup>

Yet, then as well as now, there were many things that caused people to fear: the economies of the nations around the world were collapsing; business executives having lost hope were committing suicide, large-scale unemployment was rampant.

What about today, years after a devastating Second World War which shattered dreams of a universal peace? A war which was followed by other conflicts and a world in which many are threatened by terrorist attacks, and many uncertainties?

It appears that Mr. Roosevelt's optimistic assessment, "*Nothing to fear but fear itself*" was a rather hollow shout in the wind. For all of people's optimism there are others who face the terrors of war, famine, and refugee wanderings looking for some safe haven. Even in

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<sup>1</sup> in "Nothing to Fear but..." by Dr. Oswald Hoffman on the Lutheran Hour on Aug. 1, 1982

seemingly secure countries, there are the fears of the loss of a job, the deterioration of one's health, the breakup of a marriage and the family.

In this post-modern age people rarely ask what is the root cause of all this fear. Yet also in regards to our questions about fear Jesus Christ has the answer. In the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew Jesus went so far as to say, "*Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell*" ( Matt 10: 28).

That fear of God of which Jesus spoke is a holy fear in which a believer stands in awe of the power and majesty as well as the love and justice of the LORD God. It's that kind of fear of which a believing writer of a psalm. recorded in the bible, said, "*The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever.*" ( Psalm 19:9). "*It is clean*". That means there's no dirt and no doubt attached to it. Elsewhere the bible says such fear is the beginning of wisdom!" ( Psalm 111). For it involves God's Law, his Word and obeying it!

That Word directs us to the Love and mercy of God and his dealing with sin while revealing people's salvation.

Sad enough that despite the joy and comfort of knowing God according to his Word, many people are still afraid. They may have respect for a lot of people but not for God. They seek for recognition and approval from everyone yet seldom listen to God.

"Yet", said Jesus to his followers, "*Don't be afraid of people.*" "*Whatever is covered up will be uncovered, and every secret will be*

*made known. Whatever I tell you in the dark you must repeat in broad daylight..... “*

O yes, there are many who have good reason to be afraid and tremble. For God is a “consuming fire” ( Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29). Those who arrogantly resist the Lord and trample on his Word in deliberate disobedience have much to fear. For that “fire” which is God is burning still. One day he returns to wreak vengeance on his adversaries.

The world in which we live is being consumed by its own fear. When the holy fear of God is cast aside and people look only to themselves they so often fall into a pit of violence, greed, hatred and envy. Do they think their wealth will save them. It is a delusion. Will endless rows of soldiers and powerful rockets ensure their life and happiness? It is but a terrible mistake.

Only faith in Jesus Christ, only clinging to him in genuine love and devotion, is essential to living a fearless life of service to him and in love for one’s neighbor. For the love of God and the love *for* God saves rather than destroys. Christ Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. He alone can cure our fears and quiet restless, fearful souls.

Jesus Christ knows his Father. No wonder for they are intimately joined. Jesus once said, “ He who has seen me has seen the Father for He and I are one! So Jesus sought to lay to rest the fears of his disciples.

*For only a penny” ( said Jesus) “ you can buy two sparrows, yet not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father’s*

*consent. As for you even the hairs of your head have all been counted. Do not be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows.”*

Believe this, *“His eye is on the sparrow”* But then his eye is even more on you and me. Said Jesus to his followers, *“ I have redeemed you; you are mine.” “ I have redeemed you”*. That means, I’ve rescued you, I’ve paid the price of your ransom. I went through a terrible, fearful valley of suffering, loneliness and death for you. That you might live a life free from the shackles of sin and despair.

God sent his Son, his One and Only Son, and the cross of Calvary became the mercy seat where your and my sins are completely forgiven, our lives healed..... in the way of faith.... of trusting Jesus at his Word.

Living with Christ and for Christ is real living. Real life is not getting your hands on as much stuff as you can make your own. It is not joining that crowd which throws caution to the wind to live it up, regardless of the consequences. It is instead that humble life in which a believer can say, *“ I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff will comfort me.”*<sup>2</sup>

In the bible we meet the shepherd’s rod and staff. I think in particular of Psalm 23. They are the shepherd’s tools for correcting and protecting his sheep. With that staff he pulls back into line a sheep going astray. Well-aimed, that rod can knock out a wolf intent on killing a lamb.

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<sup>2</sup> from Psalm 23

God's Word is like a rod and staff to protect his people. But then we must heed that word. Sheep are very stubborn by nature and so are we. Give in to that nature and you will not find rest. Trusting in God and in His Word can and will provide amazing peace and courage in the midst of fearful trials and temptation.

Someone has documented the experience of a Kathryn Koob who for 444 days was an American hostage in Iran. She was mistreated and even when she and the other hostages with her were blindfolded and had their hands bound at night, Kathryn later asked, "*Who was captive in that situation?*" "*The ones who were bound by those cords, or the ones who were bound by hatred, hostility and malice?*"

She said, "*I was free, I found out that the yoke of Jesus - his forgiving love - was an easier burden to bear than the hate and the spirit of revenge.*"<sup>3</sup> She prayed to God. She was free in the Spirit. The love of God gave her strength to pray even for her enemies. When she was hauled before the cameras at Christmas time in Iran she didn't know what to say. So instead she sang a little old cradle song, "*Me near me Lord Jesus, I ask You to stay, close by me forever, and love me I pray.*" "*Bless all the dear children, in your tender care, and take us to heaven to live with you there.*"

It is really not true that we have nothing to fear but fear itself. There is One to fear, One to trust, One to love and One to serve. There is One to love and to be loved. It is Jesus Christ. Those who really believe can and do live without fear for love for Him casts out fear.

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in "Nothing to Fear But..." a message of Dr. O. Hoffmann and broadcast on The Lutheran Hour. Aug. 1, 1982.

Well then, turn to Him, believe and do not fear.  
thanks for tuning in today.

Amen and