

## “Conquering our fears”

March 4, 2007

Text: *Psalm 27, 1 John 4:16-21*

### I.

Our reading from **Psalm 27** this morning talks about fear ...

- ... how we deal with our fears,
- ... how we conquer them and rise above them as people of faith and love.

We all have our fears, don't we, our anxieties? Things, thoughts, realities that send a chilling shiver up our spine.

There's a *Peanuts* cartoon where little Linus is afraid to go to the Library. Seems like a total mystery; no one can understand it. Wanting to be helpful, Charlie Brown tries to relieve him of his fear, saying,

*It's okay, Linus, everyone is lonely in some place.*

Linus, then, asks Charlie Brown, *Where is that place for you.*

And Charlie answers, *planet earth.*

Once again, although Charlie Brown is often over the top in his assessment of things, still, *we all have our fears and anxieties.*

The Bible knows. Indeed, many of the Psalms in the Bible are pleas for safety, protection and well being—in the face of all kinds of evil and dark forces that at times surround us; in the face of the daily pressures of life that build up in our spirit leaving us limp and overwhelmed.

### II.

In the first verses of Psalm 27, the Psalmist ponders:

*The Lord is the light of my salvation; whom shall I fear?*

*The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

These words of reassurance strengthen us and give us courage.

Clearly, there are forces in life that we experience all the time (forces embodied in people, in real human beings)—forces that we ought to fear. For they seek to do us harm, whether it's financial ... or emotional ... or physical harm.

Again and again in the Psalms, the psalmist alludes to these **evildoers**, to the **wicked ... to adversaries, enemies, and false witnesses** ... and to **sinner**s of all stripes. In other words, people trying to take advantage and do us personal harm in some way.

The truth of our lives is that there's a lot to fear in the wider world. As we hear all the time, *it's a dangerous world out there*. So, what are we to do?

### III.

Predictably, the Psalmist looks to God for protection and well being. He says,

*One thing I ask of the Lord, that I seek after everyday ...*

- *is to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life ...*
- *and to behold the beauty of the Lord and to find respite in his temple.*

In other words, *what do we do?* We seek the presence of God. If we think about it, what are our options? We can only protect ourselves up to a point. We can only go so far in trying to control all the variables of our lives that contribute to our security and well being.

All the time in life, we come to a *crossroads of trust*. Simply put, as people of faith, **we must have trust**. We must place our ultimate trust in God: in the forces of goodness in life; in the forces of love, kindness and compassion that we find revealed in one another.

Friends, we gotta trust ... and when we do with a mature faith, it makes all the difference. It literally changes our reality and the way we see and experience the world.

### IV.

One night a house caught fire and a young boy was forced to flee to the roof. As the flames rages, the father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling to his son, ***Jump, son, I'll catch you***. He knew the boy had to jump to save his life. All the boy could see, however, was flames, and smoke and blackness every where. Understandably, the boy was afraid to jump.

His father kept yelling, ***Son, jump; you have to jump. I will catch you.***

But the boy protested, ***Daddy, I can't see you.***

The father replied, ***But I can see you, son, and that's all that matters.***

Although our lives are seldom this dramatic, there comes a point with any of our fears and anxieties when we have to *turn them over ... turn them over to God*. As people of faith, we have to live our lives counting on God, trusting in God ...

Where trusting in God means trusting in the spirit of God ...

- to build up and to make things better ...
- to radiate a positive energy in the world that seeks to do good and impart love and kindness wherever we can.

Our Psalm this morning conveys a deep trust and confidence that God will protect us:

- *For God will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble ...*
- *God will conceal me under the cover of his tent ...*
- *he will set me high on a rock ...*

What this means for us is that the hand of God's care and compassion will envelop us ... which means the forces of goodness and love will rise up in the Spirit and make a difference. It's a faith thing ... and a love thing. They work together.

#### IV.

Perhaps one of our deepest fears is the fear of abandonment or meaninglessness. It is the existential fear that somehow, at the end of the day, our lives don't matter ...

1. that we're just going through the motions ...
2. that there's no ultimate meaning to our lives ...
3. And that God is somehow distant, leaving us with an awful sense of spiritual abandonment. It's a wrenching experience to feel utterly *alone* and *isolated* in our life's journey.

Again, the Psalmist knows: *Come, my heart says, seek God's face. Your face, Lord, do I seek.* And then, with a wistful yearning in the spirit, the psalmist cries out:

- *Do not hide your face from me.*
- *Do not turn your servant away in anger ...*
- *do not cast me off ... do not forsake me, O GOD OF MY SALVATION.*

The Psalmist speaks out of a deep sense of yearning, out of a longing in the spirit ... a spiritual hunger. That's important and is a key to a vibrant faith: that we constantly seek the presence of God. And what does that mean?

It means to do our best, everyday, to do good ... to love our neighbor ... to have compassion for the needy. To lift up the lowly ... to reach out with forgiveness and mercy in our heart. In a word, friends, this is how we **conquer our fears** ...

#### V.

You see, LOVE casts out fear ...

- We conquer our fears by loving one another.
- By giving our spirit and our lives to the forces of goodness and renewal.

Our reading from 1 John helps cement this very point:

*So we have **known and believe** the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God ... and God abides in them.*

*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear ... and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.*

In the famous novel, *The Diary of a Country Priest*, by **Georges Bernanos**, there's a moving scene in which the priest encounters a woman who, having endured one personal loss after another, has turned inward.

She's been abandoned by her daughter, betrayed by her husband, and death has claimed her young son. Her heart is hardened. Although it is months later now, she can barely get out of bed in the morning hours. Numbed by her sorrows, she has tucked herself in to her fears.

The priest is talking to her, beseeching her to unlock her hardened heart and to open herself again to life. He says to her: *of all the hells that can befall us, the worst hell is not to love.*

Wow! That's a wake-up-call phrase, isn't it? *The worst hell is not to love.*

***Love casts out all fear ... and pain.*** It opens us to life and to hope. We can sense it in the closing words of the psalmist ... a passionate affirmation of faith:

***I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage. Wait for the LORD.***

*Come, O Holy One, come!* Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

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