

## LOVE AND FEAR



### Scripture:

### Psalm 138

<sup>1</sup>I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; <sup>2</sup>I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything. <sup>3</sup>On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.

<sup>4</sup>All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth. <sup>5</sup>They shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD. <sup>6</sup>For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away.

<sup>7</sup>Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me. <sup>8</sup>The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

### I John 4:16b-21

<sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. <sup>18</sup>There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. <sup>19</sup>We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup>Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup>The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

### This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



*Our guest preacher was Dr. Bernie Adeney-Risakotta is Professor of Religion and Social Science and founding director of the Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS) at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He also teaches at Duta Wacana Christian University (DWCU) and Muhammadiyah University Yogyakarta. ICRS is the first and only consortium in the world, of Muslim, Christian and secular universities, for studying the impact of religions on society. From 1982 until 1991, he taught at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley and has since lived and worked in Indonesia. His wife, Dr. Farsijana Adeney-Risakotta, also teaches at DWCU and has served as head of the Indonesian Women's Coalition in their province—a predominantly Muslim group that seeks to empower women and children. Bernie and Farsijana are Presbyterian Mission Co-Workers, supported in their work by PCUSA.*

(Please note: This sermon was transcribed from a cassette tape made at the time Dr. Adeney-Risakotta preached. The Indonesian names and words are spelled phonetically and are as close as I could understand. C.M., editor)

## LOVE AND FEAR

I bring you greetings from the church in Indonesia. There are twenty-five million Christians in Indonesia, if you can believe it, in an island nation with eighteen-thousand islands spread out over an area larger than the United States. It is the largest Muslim country in the world and it's a wonderful country. I went there thinking I would be there for just a few years in 1991, and I'm still there.

I remember when we got married about eighteen years ago my wife and I made a decision. We were moving to a new city and we were both going to be teaching in a Christian university and we decided that we didn't want to accept the university housing that was all faculty members who were grouped together. They were all Christians. We wanted to live in the middle of a village of Muslims. That was the majority of the people around us. So we left the house that they offered us and we bought a house in this all Muslim neighborhood.

## EASY TO SMILE

Now I had been in Indonesia long enough not to be worried about living in a Muslim neighborhood. Most of the Muslims I knew were wonderful, kind people, very warm. They have a saying that's called "mudah senyum," which means "easy to smile," and Indonesians are very easy to smile. They are very hospitable and very open people. So I wasn't worried about living among a village of Muslims.

## WHAT ABOUT THE RADICAL MUSLIMS?

But I did have some worries about the radicals. In Indonesia you can always tell the radicals because they not only dress in Islamic dress, but they try and dress to look just like the prophet Mohammed. So they dress in white robes and they have scraggly beards if they are men. They have a whole different way of dressing and being around. So I wondered. Indonesia at that time was in a lot of turmoil. There was a "people power" movement that brought down General Suharto as president. There were a lot of demonstrations; there was a lot of tension and I wondered, "What will the Muslim radicals think about an American Christian moving into their neighborhood?"

Well this little bit of anxiety was magnified the first day I was sitting outside my house. This young Muslim radical guy walked by my house, right in front. He lived right next door to me, and he was on his way to the mosque that was just down the street. So like it or not, he had to walk by my house a lot of times because he went to the mosque a lot.

Most Muslims go to the mosque maybe once a week on Friday, but they do their daily prayers five times a day just wherever they are. But this guy went to the mosque a lot so he was always going by my house. And every time he went by my house, he scowled at me, and I had that familiar feeling that is a very biological human feeling of

fight or flight. Either I wanted to scowl back at him, or I wanted to avoid him completely, get away from him.

## I SMILED AND SAID, "GOOD MORNING."

Well, I thought about it and I thought about my own fear. I wondered if he might want to do harm to us. I decided that I didn't go to Indonesia to be afraid. I went to Indonesia because I believed that God loves the people of Indonesia just like God loves me. So I decided okay, I'll be a little bit hypocritical; I'll fight my instincts and I'll smile. So I smiled at him, and I said, "Good morning." He just looked confused and kept going.

To make a long story short, every day he went by my house, every day I greeted him, every day I smiled at him. By the end of the week, he was smiling back at me and greeting me and we became friends.

**I had to overcome my fear in order to treat him as a human being, not someone to hide from or to attack, but someone to accept and to love. And that changed our relationship in a very radical way.**

## GOD IS LOVE

The passage that we just read from 1 John has one basic message and that is that God is love. God is love. I wonder if you believe it. I wonder if you believe it. That actually is the very core of the Good News. The Good News, the Gospel, is that God is love. The Good News is that God loves us even when we don't love God which is most of the time. God is not too easy to love. Maybe some people find it easy to love God. I don't. But we're told that God is love, and Jesus said that we are meant to be like God. I don't think Jesus meant that we were meant to be omnipotent or omniscient or omnipresent. Rather we are to be in the world as God is in the world, loving our neighbors. This is the great commandment of Jesus: Love God and love your neighbor. They are the same.

## RAMADAN

When we were in our Muslim neighborhood for a while, we couldn't help but notice when Ramadan came about. In Ramadan there is a lot of celebration. It's funny, because it's the fasting month. Everybody is obedient. Not all Muslims are obedient just like all Christians aren't obedient. But if you are obedient, you fast during the whole month of Ramadan. Time for fasting means from the time the sun comes up until the time the sun goes down. I don't know why, but they figure it starting at about 3:30 in the morning. They get up at 3:30 in the morning and have breakfast and then they are fasting all day until 6:00 at night when the sun goes down. During that whole period of time, you can't eat, you can't even drink water; you are not even supposed to swallow your spit, although I don't know how anyone would know.

But also, you are supposed to fast against anger, you're supposed to fast against impatience, you're not supposed to yell at anybody, you're supposed to be kind, you're supposed to fast from all your sins as well. So it is a month of purification. Every evening my wife and I noticed that the mosque, which is just down the street from us, would serve a big meal because when the sun goes down, then everybody eats and they eat good food usually.

### **ZAINAL AND THE MOSQUE**

We had a good friend named Zainal who was the head of the mosque, and Zainal and his wife would come home from work after working all day long and fasting all day long, and then when they got home they would cook masses of food to serve to all the people who had come to the mosque for the evening meal.

I was a little puzzled because most of the people around us, most of our neighbors were poor. Zainal himself was a lowly administrator at the university and had a very, very small salary. So I wondered how they served all these people. So I asked Farsijana because she knows more about Indonesia than I do, and she said, "Well, of course, they get donations from the community. The community gives donations and then they make the food. It's simple."

So she said to me, "Maybe we should give a donation. We're part of the community."

Well, this was a little bit of a stretch for me. I said, "But we give money to the church, we give money to Christian organizations. Should we be giving money to the mosque?"

She said, "Why not?" She said, "You only think that way because you're an American."

Well, she knew that was a good way to get my goat, and so I said, "Okay, let's do it!"

So we decided on an amount of money and we put it in an envelope, and we ordered a big one-hundred-fifty pound sack of raw rice, and we set out to go to Zainal's house to visit him and to bring him the money and the rice.

### **ZAINAL RAN TO MEET US**

When we were just coming close to his house, he ran out to greet us, and he said, "Bernie, Farsijana." Actually he said "Pak Bernie and Ibu Farsijana" because everybody calls each other with family names in Indonesia. Pot means father; ibu means mother. So he called her mother and me father. He said, "Why are you coming to visit us?"

And I said, "Well, we just want to see you."

He said "I was just about to come and visit you."

That was interesting to us because usually you honor somebody by going to their house. In America you honor people by inviting them to your home, but in Indonesia you honor people by just stopping by their house. They feel like that's a great thing to do.

So I said, "Why were you going to come and visit us?"

And he answered, "Bernie, we have a problem in our community, and we were wondering if there was a possibility you might help?"

So I said, "What's the problem?"

Zainal said, "Well, you know we serve meals every night at the mosque and we get a hundred people or more every night and they are all the poor people of the village, and they all come to the mosque to eat, and we don't have any money, and we don't have any rice left."

So I decided I'd give him a little bit of a hard time. We were friends. So I said, "Why would you think that we would help the mosque program with meals? We're Christians and you're Muslims and that's your problem. We give money to the church and why would you think that we would be involved in a mosque program?"

He looked kind of embarrassed and ashamed. He said, "I'm sorry Bernie. Of course you don't need to do anything. We understand. We'll find another way around it."

### **WE WANT TO SUPPORT YOU**

And I smiled at him and I said, "But Zainal, I was just kidding. That is really why we came. We came because we want to be a part. We are so in admiration of you. You work all day long; you fast all day long; you come home from work and you and your wife work all evening long cooking for all these people. We want to support you. It's a wonderful thing you're doing."

**But Zainal almost started crying.  
He said, "Bernie, how could you have known?  
How could you possibly have known?"  
Well, my wife had an answer.  
Farsijana replied immediately.  
She said, "The Holy Spirit told us."**

My thinking was that the Holy Spirit told her and she told me. That led into a conversation with Zainal about how does God speak to us, is God alive, is God speaking and interacting with us and how does he as a Muslim experience the voice of God, and how do we as Christians experience the voice of God? It was a wonderful opening and in a sense it changed things again because from then on we always gave donations to the mosque to help with renovations, to help with their feeding program, and they always gave donations to us. (Do you remember the sacrifice of Abraham when they sacrificed goats?) They would always send goat meat and other things to us and until today they still do.

### **WHO IS YOUR NEIGHBOR?**

Who is our neighbor? Are you afraid of your neighbors?

Today, currently, twenty-three per cent of the world are Muslims. According to the Pew Foundation, it will soon be thirty per cent of the world. Thirty per cent of the world are Muslims. That twenty-three per cent of the world is as many people as the whole of the USA and China put together. Or it is two times the population of the United States and all of Europe – twice as many!

Where are they? Where are all these Muslims? Sixty-two percent of them are in Asia; thirty per cent are in Africa. That doesn't leave that many left in the Middle East. The ones in the Middle East are killing each other and flooding into Europe and the United States. They are growing rapidly in the United States, but the center of Islam is no longer in the Middle East; the center of Islam, I believe, is moving to Asia, not only because that is where most Muslims are, but also because that is where Islam is most dynamic and most tolerant. There are more Muslims in Indonesia than the whole Middle East put together.

### **ARE YOU AFRAID OF MUSLIMS?**

Are you afraid of Muslims? The passage we read says that love casts out fear, that there is no fear in love.

Do you remember my neighbor, the young man who I was afraid of? A few years later he came upon me at a time when I was in extreme grief. My wife's brother, John, had been living with us in our house for several years. He had been married for about three months and that morning he had been joking around with me, kidding around; he changed the flat tire on our sister-in-law's car. He even did the dishes that day which was kind of uncharacteristic for a Javanese male.

I went to my office and I was teaching a class, and suddenly I got called from my class. They said there is an urgent phone call. I talked on the phone and they said there is something wrong with John; can you come home?

So I rushed home, because I could tell that the person who called was in panic mode. I rushed home and I found him lying in the bathroom. He had just taken a bath and he didn't appear to be breathing. I picked him up from the floor and I carried him and put him in a bed and I gave him CPR and I gave him mouth to mouth, and then I called somebody to drive us in my car to the hospital. We took him to the hospital where they worked on him, but he was gone.

And I didn't know what to do. I had climbed mountains with him. He was in good health; he was just married. His heart just stopped, and he was gone.

### **MY RADICAL MUSLIM NEIGHBOR WAS MY GOOD SAMARITAN**

So I was in front of my house and I was weeping, and my young Muslim radical friend saw me, and he came up to me, and he said, "Bernie, what's wrong? How can I help?"

I didn't know what to say. I said, "John died. I don't know what to do."

And he sort of took hold of me and he said, "I will help you. Get on the back of my motorcycle. I will take you to the village head, and then I will organize all the things that need to be organized for the village to come and comfort you."

So we went around on these little roads until we got to the place where the head of the village was and I reported, and then he took me home. He said, "Just go and be with your family. I'll take care of everything."

He went to the mosque and they made announcements from the loud-speaker on the mosque on the death of John. They went and rented a big tent to put over the street; they blocked off the street at two ends, and then they got all the young people to bring chairs to set up in the street in front of our house. Then all the women of the village started to cook and they brought food and the whole village came to our house to comfort us. It was a Muslim village comforting the stranger, the Christian, the American. And it was all organized by the man I was afraid of.

How do we overcome fear? If you've been watching the news for the last couple of weeks, I'd be surprised if you weren't afraid. The news has been full of fear – attack, kill, build a wall.

In the story I just told, I was like the man lying on the side of the road bleeding, like the man in the picture on the bulletin cover and on page one of this sermon copy. And this Good Samaritan was not me. The Good Samaritan was my Muslim radical neighbor.

### **WE ARE ALL IN GOD'S HANDS**

God is love. Do you believe it?

I read somewhere in the paper that faith is ninety-nine percent doubt and one per cent hope. I don't know about that, but I know that the meaning of my life is based on the conviction that God is love. That is not something I know, it's something I hope. But I believe it and that is what Jesus came to tell us, that God is love, that the foundation of reality is love and we can rest and trust God that the world is in God's hands, and that we are in God's hands and that God loves us.

Who are your neighbors? The Good Samaritan story actually reverses that question and asks, "Who are you a neighbor to?" Love annihilates fear and loving our neighbors is good for us. It enables us to live without fear and also will decrease your intake of anti-acids.

This is the Word of the Lord!



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