

FEAR DESTROYS, LOVE BUILDS



Scripture:

Psalm 33:20-22

²⁰Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and shield. ²¹Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. ²²Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

Luke 12:32-36

In the book of Matthew, this same discourse by Jesus is written in the longer version. He first explains how to not be a hypocrite when you pray, then he teaches the Lord's Prayer, and follows that with an answer to a question from a very large crowd of thousands about being materialistic.

In response to their question he asks: "Why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They don't toil, neither do they spin."

In the book of Luke his words are recorded in a pithier way. Jesus says,

³²"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

³⁵"Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks.

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



Do not be afraid little flock. What worries you today? What do you fear?

Assault rifle access? Stock Market plummeting? War in Iran? Bank account dwindling? Health problems? Eyesight and hearing fading?

We could go on, but your blood pressure probably already went up from us just saying that list of worries out loud.

HOW TO NOT WORRY

Jesus understood human beings well. He was coming close to the end of his ministry, so he

fervently preached about important topics like "how to not worry." He had observed people fretting about what to eat, what to wear, and about their bodies in general.

Unfortunately, our society today is even worse than the society back then. All the commercials on TV inflame our worries about these things. We compare ourselves to the models we see, and we compare our meals to the fancy meals we see on restaurant commercials. Comparisons cause fear that we don't measure up somehow. That fear causes disharmony and it can even instill hate.

FEELING HATE

I remember feeling hate when I would go into the poverty-stricken neighborhoods of Prince George's County with my co-worker from the Center for Addiction and Pregnancy. We went to homes where we would check up on the women in our health department program who were addicted to drugs. If they were absent two days in a row, we would make home visits and see what had happened to them and encourage them to stick to the program. We were an alternative to jail. So, if we reported their absence they would go to jail.

I was usually the only white person in these neighborhoods when we would go to visit these apartments. And I could feel the comparisons between my assumed easy life and their hard lives causing hatred.

DISCRIMINATION

They viewed me as a privileged white person who was born into a life with an easier path to success than they were given just because I was born with white skin. I understood that and agreed with them. Not that they should hate me, but they had many experiences in their lives that inflamed their fears of being discriminated against. I had none of those experiences in my life. The only discrimination I had suffered was in high school, being a country kid versus a city kid. We were called "hicks" when we played sports with teams from the big cities of Council Bluffs or Des Moines. But I never felt afraid, just angry.

A REMEDY FOR FEAR

Here is a remedy for fear from the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard as he contemplates this message from Jesus today. He said, "Worldly worry always seeks to lead a human being into the small-minded unrest of comparisons, and away from the lofty calmness of simple thoughts. ... As the busyness increases, there come to be more and more in each generation who slavishly work a whole lifetime far down in the low underground regions of

comparisons. Indeed, just as miners never see the light of day, so these unhappy people never come to see the light of uplifting, simple thoughts, those thoughts about how glorious it is to be a human being."

If only it was that easy, to just be thankful to be human. Today, there are groups of people who have reasons to fear because they are not being treated like humans. They are being treated like animals, and their fear is valid.

**When Jesus tells us not to fear,
he also tells us to be responsible
for justice and alleviating
the fears in others.
We must listen empathically to others'
fears and help them find peace and
safety in community. Do justice,
love kindness, walk humbly.**

SOJOURNER'S MAGAZINE

I read this excerpt from an article in the Sojourner's magazine edited by Reverend Jim Wallis who wrote the book *God's Politics – Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It – A New Vision for Faith and Politics in America*. It is equally critical of both the Right and the Left.

The article was written on August 8th by one of his staff members at Sojourners, which is a progressive monthly magazine of the American Christian social justice organization called Sojourners in Washington, D.C.

I hope you can listen with an ear to understand what it is like to walk in the shoes of these folks who are walking in fear like never before in our own country. Even when they are legal citizens or green card holders in the United States, they are targeted.

The author is Sandy Ovalle and the title of her article is 'THREATS OF ANNIHILATION LIVE IN OUR BONES': THE ENDURING RESILIENCE OF LATINX COMMUNITIES

Ovalle wrote: “El Paso’s vibrant life was abruptly interrupted this past Saturday. Twenty-two people were killed, twenty-six were injured, and Latinx (combines Latino and Latina) communities everywhere were reminded that brown-bodied people in this country are often perceived as something to be eliminated through deliberate acts of violence. And although we come from a multitude of identities, histories, skin colors, and cultures, we are united by so many beautiful things. We are also united by the perceived threat that we are to this nation. This threat of extermination lives in our bones and now feels much more real. We are not ok.

Deep fear has set in Latinx communities all over the country. Latinx friends in Texas feared going to church on Sunday. They continue to fear for their children at school and for their relatives with darker skin who live in border towns. We are experiencing the horrifying consequences of intentional mockery, constant questioning of our presence in the country, and violent incidents.”

She goes on to say: “My body ached as I flew back from El Salvador this week knowing that I would land in a country where people like me had just been killed. And my fears were not unfounded. When I landed in the U.S., a Customs and Border Patrol Officer screened my Mexican passport chanting, ‘Trump, Trump, Trump is the best president we’ve ever had.’

Standing in front of him in my brown body, I was afraid. In the midst of the violence our community has experienced, this chant was intended as a form of intimidation.”

FEAR OF PEOPLE WHO ARE DIFFERENT

Fear of people who don’t look or speak like we do is the fear that inspired the shootings in Gilroy and in El Paso. The gunmen feared that, somehow, they are a threat to our nation rather than people who enhance our population with the gifts and talents they bring from their heritage.

This image is especially heart wrenching. Both these young people were killed while shielding their baby.



When we are told to not fear, that includes not fearing our brothers and sisters. Remember, “red and yellow, black and white, we are all precious in God’s sight.” We are created to learn from each other when there are differences. We are created to support and care for each other no matter the circumstances we find the other in. Our human global survival is dependent upon working together in harmony. When we exclude one type of people, we are hurting our future development and adaptation ability as the world evolves and changes over time.

BEHAVE AS A TRUE, CARING CHRIST FOLLOWER

Sometimes when my job assignment back in the Washington, D.C. area was to go to the housing projects in Prince George’s county, we would find the mother high on drugs. Instead of slamming her for falling off the wagon, we took food, baby supplies and toys for her other kids. We would encourage her to try again and come back to the program. We listened to what she was going through and why she had given up. The program director believed in second chances.

The reason I was never afraid going into those dangerous neighborhoods just outside of Washington, D.C. was because I knew I was going there with good will and empathy. The

people who intensely watched us go in and out of the apartments figured it out quickly that we were there to be helpful and supportive rather than judgmental and hateful.

When you carry yourself as a true, caring Christ follower in this world, you walk with tender loving care in your heart, and the people you meet can feel it when you look them in the eyes, human to human, and smile at them.

The armor of love is your best armor against violence. That is your safety net that helps you get along with whoever you meet.

Ovalle's article in *Sojourner's* ended with suggestions for living that we can all follow. She said, "Life-giving actions should be celebrated: mourning with our loved ones, sustaining their lives, advocating for justice, staying together, and caring for others all serve to preserve life."

But she added, "Yes, threats of annihilation live in our bones, but so does life, radiating from many generations. Our ancestors were resilient and fought for life and we must also lean into life fiercely."

These words resonate with today's message from Jesus (who also happened to have brown skin). He was threatened with annihilation long before he was killed, not because of his skin but because he was rebelling against the social norms to neglect the vulnerable and against authorities and laws that were unjust.

He was threatening the authorities' power and they feared Jesus because he was taking over their territory of leadership in the temple and in the community.

LIVING LIFE TODAY

And Jesus would want us to respond today by living life resiliently and leaning into life fiercely. He said, "Do not fear my little flock." Jesus wanted everyone who would listen to him to feel free to lean into life, to enjoy the moments, the beauty, each other, without worry or fear that destroys ourselves and others.

Today, Christ wants us to use his kind of love to build up the kingdom of God here on earth, a kingdom of love, justice, and freedom for all.

Yes, as concerned Christians, we need to call on Congress to act and advocate to end gun violence. But we also need to be committed to living our lives empathically, defending the lives of others who are living in fear.

Our hearts must not treasure money or things, but instead we are called to treasure all people, no matter what they look like or where they come from.

And then we will be fit and ready to open the door when Jesus knocks, and welcomes us into that heavenly realm with, "Well done good and faithful servants." Amen

Benediction:

I'm glad to be able to predict that the recent passing of pillars in our church - Alice, Jeanne and Fred, Margie, Gladys, Mickey - all of them were spiritually fit and ready to open the door when Jesus knocked. They treasured the love of God and people in their hearts.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore. Amen



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