

Faith Filled Living

Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-16

Luke 12: 32 – 40

August 8, 2010 – UM

Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts and minds, be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer, amen.

Anybody here worry?

Fearful?

What do you worry about?

What makes you fearful?

Children?

The future?

The environment?

Wars and violence?

Job security?

You are not alone...

Rev. David Giuliano, former Moderator of the United Church for the next two years says this about fear:

I think that I am Moderator of The United Church of Canada because God gave me three words to speak: "Be not afraid."

I've said and written literally millions of words before and since I quoted that oft-repeated gospel admonition.

None of them have so touched the collective spirit of our community.

None have been more poignant in my own journey personally.

They are a gift and a core to welcoming the activity of the Holy Mystery in our lives.

Here are some things, in no particular order, I believe about fear:

Fear is always about the future. We fear neither past nor present.

As such, fear exists in our imagination.

Fear can be paralyzing.

Fear makes us stupid.

Fear, when it is our master, is our enemy. Fear when we master it, is our friend.

The opposite of fear is faith, not courage (which is going ahead in spite of fear.)

Fear can make us cling to the present even if it's bad for us or the world.

Fear can make us cling to ideas even if they are bad for us or the world.

Fear can make us cling to things even if they are bad for us or the world.

Fear can make us to cling to people even to death—our own or another's (picture drowning victims).

Fear can make us sick.

Fear causes us to make safe choices.

Fear wakes us up or keeps us awake at night.

Fear can clog the ears and block the eyes of the heart.

Fear strangles creative imagination by the throat.

Fear can lead to distrust.

Fear is used by the powers of empire to enslave human spirit.

Fear can be a sign that God wants something of/for us.

Those are some things I have come to know about fear. What would you add to the list?
(<http://www.united-church.ca/en/communications/news/moderator/070726>)

Both readings this morning speak of fear and faith.

The epistle begins with these words: Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

And Jesus says this: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

These two sentences, tell us that there is no reason to worry or be fearful, because no matter what our circumstances we are in God's care and keeping.

One of the things I think it is important to remember is that our scriptures were not written in a time of peace and absence of violence or tension.

The gospel readings was written in a time when the Jewish people were living under Roman oppression, where there were restrictions of their activities, where they were taxed without representation, where their access to justice was severely curtailed.

And, while this letter is not attributed to Paul, it was written to a community that was experiencing tension and strife within itself.

It reminds the people that God made promises to their ancestor Abraham, that there would be a Promised Land... that he and Sarah would have a child in their old age...

And those ancestors stepped out in faith in a new direction, confident that they were in God's keeping.

So, the words, 'do not be afraid' are not some nebulous, pie in the sky notion that were said to simply make the people feel better.

No, they were very specific... 'do not be afraid.'

God is here...

That's what the gospel writer meant when he wrote, "For it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

How many times is Jesus reported to say, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

Right here, right now.

Be not afraid.

How do we not be afraid?

I don't know what works for you... but the only thing that really works for me is spending time in prayer.

To open myself to the power and presence of God.

To put myself in God's keeping.

In the time crunched world that most of us live in, it's not easy even for me to make time for prayer every day.

If I skip prayer for a day, I may not notice any difference in myself immediately.

If I skip it for a couple days, I may feel a bit off...

And if I have skipped it for several days, I know that I am increasingly less able to handle what life brings me...

I find that I am less effective in every aspect of my life, including being your minister.

The gospel also says, "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit."

I think regular prayer is like being dressed for action.

It's not something that you can call on just in emergencies or crises.

For those of you who are musical, how many hours are spent in practice in order to play a piece smoothly and skilfully.

For those of you who golf, when you swing at the ball, are you thinking of each individual muscle group that must perform in a swing?

And did you or do you go out and hit a bucket of balls over and over again in order to perfect your swing?

Almost everyone drives a car... and for most of us it is a fairly automatic set of actions.

Those of us who drive a stick shift, do you remember learning that?

How many steps you need to do just to get the car moving ahead... put car into first gear... oops, didn't put one foot on the clutch!

One foot pushing on the gas, the other raising the clutch pedal.

And you want me to steer too?

And you practiced, over and over again... whether it is playing the piano, golfing or driving.

Practiced until most of it was an automatic response... and you are able to call on the necessary skills even under pressure.

Prayer is like that... we need to practice it... so that it becomes an automatic response to what life brings us...

Not to become an empty ritual or a substitute for action that rightly belongs to us.

But to ground us, to encourage us, to remind us that we are in God's care no matter what our circumstances and no matter what life brings us.

Be not afraid.

Thanks be to God, amen.

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