

## Easter 6

*Canon Ed Pruen*

**26.5.19**

**Bentworth, Shalden, Lasham, Medstead**

BE NOT AFRAID

Acts 16.9-15;

Revelation 21.10, 22 - 22.5;

**John 14.23-29.**

<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to his disciples, 'Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

<sup>24</sup> Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

<sup>25</sup> 'All this I have spoken while still with you.

<sup>26</sup> But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

<sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

<sup>28</sup> 'You heard me say, "I am going away and I am coming back to you." If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

<sup>29</sup> I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.

Let us pray

*Lord, your love overcomes all fear. Teach us to find faith, to deepen trust and to live in peace. In the name ....*

We are living in the season of promise.

The Bible is full of promises – but perhaps the weeks leading up to Pentecost are the most significant in our Christian story.

At the Ascension Jesus leaves this world physically, with the *promise* that he will always be with us – because he is sending the Holy Spirit to be within us, to heal, to guide, to encourage to strengthen, to teach, to accompany, to empower and to enable us to become Christ-like in every part of our lives.

In our Gospel reading Jesus says:

*“the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*

But then he makes His Will: a promise, a legacy from Christ:

<sup>27</sup> “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.”

And when he had risen from the dead – he immediately greets his disciples with the words: “*Peace be with you*”... the fulfilment of the promise.

And he then tells us that because of this, there is no need for our hearts ever to be “*troubled nor to be afraid*.” Be at peace.

The Bible has the words “*be not afraid*” 366 times – one for every day of the year and even for leap years!

The words “*Do not be afraid*” or “*Fear not*” are amongst the most commonly spoken words of Jesus.

The words “*fear not*” appear in almost every book of the Bible – so perhaps God is trying to tell us something!

But we seem to be living in a world that is full of fear and driven by fear. So many people today are full of anxiety. Indeed, perhaps all of us here are worried about things, anxious, perhaps really fearful about something.

Today, there is an increasing attack on Christians. It is said that if you can attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death...you are more blessed than three billion people in the world.

Fear of these things is the norm. Going to church is a risky business for 3 billion people.

For others, especially for young people today, there is the fear of not living up to the right image, the fear of being outed on social media.

So I wonder what are you afraid of?

You know most of our fears are irrational, often based on some frightening experience we had as a child.

We lose sight of our mother momentarily, and the fear of separation is born.

Later we find ourselves abandoned by someone special and once again the tape of fear starts to play.

And we all have our phobias. None of us could say that we're not afraid of something.

But science and cultural studies show us that we're right to be afraid to a level of about 10% of what is actually the situation. And so 90% of the fear that we have is unreal.

Fear is the opposite of faith. Indeed, Faith is the Antidote to Fear .

You know that saying?

*Fear knocked on the door, faith answered  
and there was no one there.*

Yet there is a place for fear – *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”*.

And those two lines in the hymn: Amazing Grace:

*“T’was grace that taught my heart to fear,  
and grace my fear relieved.”*

And fear based on experience teaches us limits, where to be cautious next time round.

I was trying to think of times when I have been genuinely afraid.

I don't like being trapped in small spaces.

I remember when I was bullied at school – and the game that seemed to give the most satisfaction to my persecutors was to lock me up in a small wooden box – a box that was for keeping the cricket stumps and cricket pads in.

And then rolling it relentlessly across the playing fields, with me inside, paralysed by fear, unable to make a sound.

There are countless different kinds of phobias, each with their own name.

Ergo-phobia - Fear of work

Globo-phobia - Fear of balloons popping

Hippo-potomonstrosesquippedalio phobia – the fear of long words!

And my favourite: Nomo-phobia - fear of being without mobile phone coverage.

Here are the top ten most common fears in the UK:

1. Heights
2. Public speaking
3. Snakes
4. Flying
5. Spiders
6. Being outside in a Crowd
7. Clowns
8. Enclosed spaces
9. Mice and rats
10. The dark

So imagine if you had to preach a sermon from a tiny pulpit, high off the ground, in the dark, surrounded by spiders, able to hear the scuttles of a church mouse, to a bunch of clowns!  
You would have to be made of strong stuff!

Psychologists tell us that there are at least four fears that we all share.

And out of these basic fears all of our other so-called fears arise.

These are:

1. Extinction—the fear of ceasing to exist. For example, that’s why we don’t like heights. It reminds us of our mortality.
2. Mutilation—the fear of losing any part of our precious bodily structure. That’s why we don’t like creepy crawlies. The fear of pain.
3. Loss of Autonomy—the fear of being immobilized, paralyzed, restricted, smothered, overwhelmed, entrapped, imprisoned. That’s why we don’t like small spaces.
4. Separation—the fear of abandonment, rejection, of *becoming a non-person*— not valued by anyone, not wanted. That’s why we don’t like speaking in public.

Now Jesus addresses these primordial fears head on.

Because interestingly, almost every tradition of psychiatry and psychology agree that as human beings we all share three basic human needs for peace of mind:

- to be loved,
  - worthwhile and
  - eternally safe.
- 
- Christmas is because he loves us,
  - the cross of Good Friday is because you are worth it,
  - the resurrection at Easter is because you are made for eternity.

Faith in Christ leads you to know that you are to be loved, worthwhile and eternally safe.

But what is the origin of fear?  
Why are humans so afraid?

And one of the reasons is, we live in this clay tent of the human body. It is very vulnerable. You are in it, you can't hide, and you can always be got to.

At the hearty of all fear is the fear of dying – and yet we live in the season of Easter... the promise that the best is yet to be.

The Catholic writer, John O'Donohue puts it this way:

Imagine you could speak with a baby in the womb before it was born, a real “with it” baby that wanted to know what was happening!

1<sup>st</sup>. And you say, ok baby, you asked for it, you're going to get it, here's the story: in a half an hour you will be expelled from the shelter of the womb where you have been formed.

2<sup>nd</sup> You will then feel that at every moment you are being smothered.

3<sup>rd</sup>. You will then arrive into a huge vacancy, probably with merciless light in it and the crashing of metal trays.

4<sup>th</sup>. The cord that connects you to the mother-heart will be cut.

5<sup>th</sup>. And then, regardless to how close you ever come to anyone in your life afterwards, you will always be on your own.

6<sup>th</sup>. You are going on a journey for which there is no map.

7<sup>th</sup>. And you can't turn back, and

8<sup>th</sup>. anything can happen to you on the journey.

Now if the baby was still vaguely breathing at that stage, it would have to conclude, things are really nice and good here, and now it looks like I'm going to die, when in actual fact what's happening is that you are being born.

And my suspicion in relation to death is that we only see the destructive side to it, when what is really happening is that we are being born again.

Maybe we have death all wrong. Because we always think of it as ending a leaving, a goodbye, instead of being a new birth.

I like these words: (*Edward Teller*)

*"When you get to the end of all the light you know and it's time to step into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing that one of two things shall happen: either you will be given something solid to stand on, or you will*

*be taught how to fly."*

Jesus makes a promise. The Holy spirit is coming to fill you, to strengthen you, to take away fear.

*26 The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*

*27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.*

*Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

Solo Song:

**Be Not Afraid** – *John Michael Talbot*

1. You shall cross the barren desert,  
but you shall not die of thirst.  
You shall wander far in safety  
though you do not know the way.  
You shall speak your words in foreign lands  
and all will understand.

You shall see the face of God and live.

*Refrain:*

Be not afraid.  
I go before you always.  
Come follow me,  
And I will give you rest.

2. Blessed are your poor,  
for the kingdom shall be theirs.  
Blest are you that weep and mourn,  
for one day you shall laugh.

And if wicked tongues insult and hate you  
all because of me,  
Bless-ed, bless-ed are you!

*Refrain*