

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners from Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

What are you afraid of? I am pretty sure all of us are afraid of something? Ants? Bears? Bugs? Death, Geckos? God? Judgement? Law? Life? Moose? People? Politics or politicians? Religion? Sharks? Snakes? The future of KLC? Or whatever? I mean, even though I talk about my simple faith and trust in God, there are still things I am afraid of – like visiting with people. As a tested and confirmed introvert it is out of my comfort zone to visit with people. Now, three of our four readings today have something to say about fear and trust.

What causes us to worry about our security and our future? After all, for our culture and society - worry, anxiety, and fear are even experienced in the best of times. Why? In fact, some people not only worry but they wallow in it. Are you that way? Do you know people like that? Fear can also become a lifestyle that demands therapy, some sort of drug, or even some sort of insurance.

What can help us and others break out of the anxiety, fear, worry cycle? Do you think a trust that something greater than ourselves is in control and can break out of the chaos in our lives? God wants our trust. God wants to help control our chaos so that we can live without anxiety. Are we willing to trust and let God? In our own lives? In the life of KLC?

Stanley Saunders begins his thoughts on our gospel reading today by simply saying: “Fear. Is there any more pervasive or powerful motivating force in human experience?” He goes on to talk about how from the moment we are born we learn to fear the world around us. We are even taught to fear the stranger, and sometimes we even fear those who are close to us. We also know political leaders have long recognized the power of fear to ensure our conformity to the structures of this world, even when we know that doing so does not serve our own best interests.

We can watch many of both our church and our political leaders all day, every day confront us with people and things to be afraid of, that our security is in jeopardy on many fronts. They also use these tactics to get money and votes. I know that I have used quotes from my favorite movie “The American President” which was made in 1995 before but I am going to quote a longer one today. Michel Douglas as President Andrew Shepard near the end of the movie says the following: “For the record: yes, I am a card-carrying member of the ACLU. But the more important question is why aren't you, Bob? Now, this is an organization whose sole purpose is to defend the Bill of Rights, so it naturally begs the question: Why would a senator, his party's most powerful spokesman and a candidate for President, choose to reject upholding the Constitution? If you can answer that question, folks, then you're smarter than I am, because I didn't understand it until a couple of minutes ago. America isn't easy. America is advanced citizenship. You gotta want it bad, 'cause it's gonna put up a fight. It's gonna say "You want free speech? Let's see you acknowledge a man whose words make your blood boil, who's standing center stage and advocating at the top of his lungs that which you would spend a lifetime opposing at the top of yours. You want to claim this land as the

land of the free? Then the symbol of your country can't just be a flag; the symbol also has to be one of its citizens exercising his right to burn that flag in protest. Show me that, defend that, celebrate that in your classrooms. Then, you can stand up and sing about the "land of the free". I've known Bob Rumson for years, and I've been operating under the assumption that the reason Bob devotes so much time and energy to shouting at the rain was that he simply didn't get it. Well, I was wrong. Bob's problem isn't that he doesn't get it. Bob's problem is that he can't sell it. Nobody has ever won an election by talking about what I was just talking about. This is a country made up of people with hard jobs that they're terrified of losing. The roots of freedom are of little or no interest to them at the moment. We are a nation afraid to go out at night. We're a society that has assigned low priority to education and has looked the other way while our public schools have been decimated. We have serious problems to solve, and we need serious men to solve them. And whatever your particular problem is, friend, I promise you, Bob Rumson is not the least bit interested in solving it. He is interested in two things and two things only: making you afraid of it and telling you who's to blame for it. That, ladies and gentlemen, is how you win elections. You gather a group of middle-aged, middle-class, middle-income voters who remember with longing an easier time, and you talk to them about family and American values and personal character. And you hold up an old photo of the President's girlfriend. You scream about patriotism and you tell them she's to blame for their lot in life."

That was 1995 folks, almost thirty years ago. I think we all recognize that fearmongering in politics has grown exponentially since then but not just in politics but also in religion and in life in general. Did you ever notice that Jews lived in constant fear from the occupying Romans and from the religious cruelty of the Pharisees and Scribes? Jesus was opposed to those. Do you see cruelty like that of the Pharisees and Scribes in some of our religious leaders today?

In our gospel reading today, Jesus addresses two different ways of generating fear for the disciples as disciples. First, Jesus talks about the suffering conditions they will face yet Jesus also tells them not to take anything that will make their journey easier, that they are to depend on God and those they are visiting. Second, Jesus talks about how discipleship, true discipleship, can cause separation from family and friends. In one of his God Pause devotionals this week on our gospel reading Jeffrey O'Grady summarizes what Jesus was saying this way: "Discipleship changes one's attachments at the most basic and profound level, even within our families, and especially within ourselves." In other words, being a disciple of Jesus, having the Spirit at work in and through us, and working for Jesus changes us in so many ways we can see and cannot see. And change always creates tension.

The last verse of our Jeremiah reading says: "Sing to the Lord! For God has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of the evildoers." God brings the chaos in our lives under control. Jeffrey O'Grady also had an interesting comment on the Jeremiah reading when he says: "Faithfulness demands facing hard truths. We are not only sin's victims, we are also sin's perpetrators."

The Psalms are filled with psalms of thanksgiving and of lament in almost equal portions. Life itself is filled with both as well. Keeping our eyes fixed on God reminds us that the “steadfast love of the Lord” is just that – steadfast. We can trust that we are not alone in our difficulty. Redemption is coming.

Hear then the good news:

Martin Luther: “Be content, therefore, and of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you. Depend boldly upon this.”

I think Martin Luther is essentially saying if we do not have to fear sin, then we do not need to fear God, so what else could there possibly be to fear?

Martin Luther: “The whole life of a good believing Christian after baptism is nothing more than awaiting the revelation of a holiness which he already has.”

Martin Luther: “Let your heart be strong and at ease in your trouble, for we have yonder a true mediator with God, Jesus Christ, who has overcome death and sin for us and now sits in heaven with all the angels, looking down on us and awaiting us.”

It is time for us to redefine who we are both as individuals and as a church. It is time for us to embrace not fear change, both as individuals and as a church, to seek and serve God in every aspect of our lives, and to share that God with everyone around us.

Have no fear, God is here. God is at work in you, in us, and in KLC.

Amen