

Unburdened of Fear (1 John 4:16-18)

For the Travelling Light Series

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We typically don't expect to hear good news of great joy coming from a graveyard. But the BEST NEWS – The BEST NEWS that has EVER been heard was proclaimed from a grave when Jesus' followers heard these words, "HE IS RISEN!"

I. Hope Overcomes Fear

Imagine how Jesus' closest friends – those who had devoted 3 years of their lives to following him – felt immediately after his crucifixion. They had made some radical changes in their lives – given up jobs and faced some disapproval from family and friends in order to respond to Jesus' invitation to do life with him. And he'd been put to death. The bible doesn't give us much insight into what they were going through in the hours and days following, but they would undoubtedly be facing significant fear, duly concerned for their own personal safety.

What we are told in the Biblical account of this story is when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to Jesus' tomb, they noticed the stone was rolled away and when they went inside. Instead of seeing Jesus' body, they saw an angel who spoke these words: "Do not be afraid. He has risen, just as he said." And nearly 2000 years later, the fact that Jesus has risen, just as he said, should continue to assure us that we have nothing to fear.

All fears can be divided into one of two categories. Fears about dying. And fears about living. The resurrection of Jesus deals with both. When we align our lives with his, his death on the cross frees us from the punishment for our sins – from spiritual death – and his resurrection ensures that we have eternal life.

"In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade."

– 1 Peter 1:3b-4a

Jesus' death and resurrection give us living hope by inaugurating the new creation – where our lives are meant to be filled with purpose and confidence, and the fear of death is replaced with the hope of eternal life.

II. Faith Overcomes Fear

There are good fears – God-given survival instincts, and there are bad fears – that can literally threaten our survival if allowed to fester and take root. Bad fears are very burdensome and, especially in the shadow of a pandemic, very prevalent.

The good news is that the same loving God who designed you with healthy fear wants to help unburden you of unhealthy fear.

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” – I Peter 5:7

Problems develop when we put more faith in ourselves than in God. Most of our prevalent fears form from an unnecessary preoccupation with self-reliance – a belief that we are ultimately responsible for ourselves - for accomplishing, acquiring, achieving, proving, providing, protecting – and we set an unrealistic and unholy benchmark, all the while overwhelmed by the fear of failure. The voices of our culture can create fear by telling you that you’re not good enough, you don’t have enough, you’re a loser, a nobody. And as those voices intensify, they drown out the voice of truth – and you may miss out on the voice of Jesus that says, “Trust me! I’m with you. I’ll never leave you. I love you. I want a relationship with you. I want a relationship with you so much that I died for you. And I have a plan for you. My plan might not look like your plan, but I assure you it’s better.”

When our plan doesn’t align with his, believe it or not, failure can be a good thing.

“Failure, loss, and defeat have much more wisdom to teach us than win after win. It is only when we are at the end of our strength that we come around to the truth of Scripture’s proclamation that life and wholeness are to be found (ONLY) in seeking God’s ways.” ¹

So could it be that the things you fear the most are connected to that which is actually drowning out the voice of truth? And standing in the way of you embracing the life – the full, abundant life – that God designed and intends for you? God is exponentially more worthy of our faith and more capable of providing for us than we, or anyone else. *Oh, for grace to trust him more.*

III. Love Overcomes Fear

El Refugio in Ensenada, Mexico is a missionary organization that rescues girls from abandonment, abuse, human trafficking, and other heart-wrenching scenarios. Oftentimes, when the girls arrive at the Refuge, they are terrified. Randy and Sandy, the couple who started this ministry have been shaped by their hope and faith in Jesus in such a powerful way that his love fills and pours out of them. The tenacious, fearless love they model, over time, breaks down the defenses the girls have built up, and their fears begin to fade.

“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” – I John 4:18

In the context of John’s emphasis on Christian love for one another throughout 1st John, not only does this verse speak to how Jesus’ love for us quells our fear, but also how we are invited to model Jesus’ love in all of our relationships and in how we prioritize how we spend our lives.

“God’s love is perfected not through our perception of it or our experience of it, but through our expression of it. God’s love reaches completion by the degree to which it is shared among us.” ²

¹ Edward Ng, *Into the Deep: Going Beyond Anxiety*

² Burge 189.

“In this world we are like Jesus.” – 1 John 4:17b

What does perfect love look like?

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” – John 15:13

“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead...” – Ephesians 1:18-20a

For Further Reflection:

- 1) How does or how could Resurrection hope confront and curtail your fears?

- 2) Do you recognize areas in your life that you struggle to entrust to Jesus? Consider how that might be contributing to your fears.

- 3) What are some ways that you recognize that pouring out Jesus’ love has helped alleviate your fears – or how would you anticipate your fears being eased by focusing on the needs of others?