

“The Biblical Understanding of Fear”

Matthew 25:14-30

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+25:14-30)

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Fear! Insecurity! Anxiety! What an emotional roller coaster we have right now in Michigan! The stock market crash is a prescription for fear. The possibility of job losses continuing is anxiety producing. The loss of an extra cushion for Christmas gifts is stressful. We are living in a time of great fear that at least matches America in 1930's. So I will go back to the 1930's to the words of Franklin D. Roosevelt who spoke to the nation on his first inauguration. In the beginning he said:

I am certain that my fellow Americans expect that on my induction into the Presidency I will address them with a candor and a decision which the present situation of our people impel. This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.

President Roosevelt was lifting a truth right out of the Bible when he spoke those famous words. Our God is not a God of fear and panic. Jesus clearly tells the fearful, insecure servant in this story that his fear that has kept him in darkness will continue to haunt him! Jesus does not affirm paralysis by fear. Jesus affirms working through the fear in faith. So the question each of us faces on a daily basis in this time in our country is:

Fear or Faith?

In Jesus' parable of the talents there were two people who creatively used their Master's gifts and were rewarded. There is one person who fearfully hid the gift away in darkness and lost everything. We might say using Biblical language that God's children who do the work of service out in the light are blessed with abundant life. Children of the light are given multiple opportunities to build up God's Beloved Community on earth. However, children of the darkness identified by a fearful and frustrated spirit continue to live overwhelmed in the darkness.

Each day you are given a choice. Will you respond to the new day with:

- ◆ faith or fear,
- ◆ hope or hopelessness,
- ◆ love or loneliness,
- ◆ light or darkness.

For the last several years all of us have been flooded with fearful messages from the media. Parenting practices have changed based upon fear. Fences between neighbors have been erected out of fear. We have religious media voices proclaiming fearful messages as to what is going to happen to America in the next few years. Fear sells media time.

As children of the light, we can expect fear to be used as a tool of the Evil One. And, we can remember Jesus' message that we are called by God cast out fear and to bring truth, to build up hope, and encourage faith. Each day you have a choice: fear or faith!

The Fear choice.

Let us quickly examine the fear choice using technological language to describe our situation. Let's look at the world as a computer. Computers are built upon a platform. The technicians call it a "mother board." The small silicon chips that cause the system to function, or malfunction are the key elements on the platform. If the platform is working right then the system will work and you can communicate with someone a world away through the internet. If the platform is defective for some unknown reason then the entire system will not work.

Many people live upon a defective platform. They live in fear of:

- ◆ Loss of control,
- ◆ Loss of security,
- ◆ Loss of material possessions,
- ◆ Loss of our entertainment options,
- ◆ Loss of our children,
- ◆ Loss of our physical capabilities,
- ◆ Loss of life itself.

The fear platform upon which many people live is partially generated and supported by our media influenced culture. Violence is our daily food from all forms of media. The response is to fear anyone different, any travel outside our accustomed routes, and any relationship with anyone who might at some point hurt us.

The end result of this fear based living is loneliness, frantic anxiety, and a constant need for acceptance. Our loneliness is hidden in lost relationships and broken families. Our anxiety is lived out through a frantic, non-stop pace of life that leaves no time for reflection, prayer, play, or worship. Our need for acceptance has us constantly playing Middle High School comparison games with automobiles, neighborhoods, clothes, techno-gadgets, and even churches.

The fear based platform leaves us lacking energy, interest, and even a willingness to live God's abundant life. Maya Angelou in *Shambhala Sun*, (January 1998, cited in *Utne Reader*, March-April 1998, 39.) warns us of the dark disease of fear based living.

Sometimes we become lethargic out of fear. It's not really laziness so much as it is timidity. We'd rather bear the ills we have than fly to others that we know not of, when in truth the place where one is standing may be untenable, it may be dangerous, it may be stultifying and it's better to just step on. You know, you have to move.

The fearful, insecure, anxious servant in Jesus story is lost in the darkness when he receives the Master's gift. And, he is lost in darkness when the gift is taken away. His life is defective. He has based his living on a platform of fear! And, he had another choice!

The Faith choice.

Jesus Christ invites us into a different way of living. We are invited to build God's Beloved Community by standing upon a platform of faith. The old gospel hymn says it best. "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand." Instead of fear based living, let us move into the light and stand upon the Rock. Let us build our lives upon an eternal platform that will not fail.

Jesus' parable recorded in Matthew warns us that in the eternal scope of things, there is accountability for our choices. Whether you chose fear or faith makes an eternal difference for you and for everyone around you. These Scripture passages give us some clear and precise teaching about God's abundant life that I call God's Beloved Community. Let me list some of the key elements on this faith platform.

- ◆ God is the continuing Creator of the universe. God created the universe. God continues to create. God sustains all creation at all times. At some point God will end creation. One of the ways the Bible talks of the end of creation is by calling it "The Day of the Lord." Holy Scripture teaches you, not to fear this day, but to work for it, to anticipate it, to even long for it. The New Testament ends with the prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus Come!" (Revelations 22:20) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=revelations+22:20)
- ◆ As children of God we live in the light of God. God's light enables us to live with confidence. John's Gospel declares that Jesus is the Word of God, the Truth of God, and the Light of God! With the help of the Spirit of the Risen Jesus working in us and through God's family we can see clearly the fear based deceptions of this world. More and more in the coming "Information Age" we will need to know God's truth! The truth is Jesus Christ our Lord, Savior, Teacher, Redeemer, and Master.
- ◆ Fear is just a normal human emotion experienced in normal times. Fear is not a platform for living. In I John 4 (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=1+john+4) we are reminded that God is *agape* (love). That is, God's *agape* is at the very creative core of the universe. God's love replaces the fear-based platform. God loves the world, we learn in John 3:16

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+3:16). God loves every part of this world; inanimate and animate, plant and animal, fish and fowl, human and non-human. The basis of God's creative action in the world is love. Through God's love, light comes into the world. Without God's love, darkness rules and fear reigns.

- ◆ Moral character is more important than material possessions and self-expression. Jesus tells us that we are accountable for how we grow our lives and for how we use the gifts God gives us for investing in God's beloved world. God gives you a talent, a passion to improve this world. Your ministry passion when expressed will make a difference for good within our world. You are challenged to be the best person you can be. And, you are called to invest yourself in building God's Beloved Community right here and right now.
- ◆ Every day is the Day of the Lord. Christ is present now. At any time, Christ will stop creating and the universe will end. When will that happen? In Mark 13:32 (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=mark+13:32), Jesus said only the Father knows the time. But, Jesus warns us to be prepared at all times. Take nothing for granted. The best way to be prepared to meet the Lord Jesus in the last day is to do the work of the Lord Jesus every day.
- ◆ God's universal music is creativity and joy. The two servants in Jesus' parable are rewarded for their ingenuity and creativity. The one servant is disciplined for his unwillingness to live with passionate creative joy. God's light evokes creativity. God's power is the power of love and joy. When you allow yourself to move within the flow of God's resurrection music, you can transform your world!
- ◆ The Bible is filled with challenges to let go of fear! 148 times "Fear Not" is spoken. 80 times "Do not fear" is the challenge. 75 times "Do not be afraid" is the admonition. You can take one verse a day and spend almost an entire year repeating the Biblical challenge to let go of fear and hold onto faith!
- ◆ The key emotions of God's Beloved Community are faith, joy, hope, and love. Over and over again Scripture teaches us to hope in God, put our trust in God, grow in our faith relationship with God, and most of all, to live the life of God's love. When a people choose to live from the solid rock platform of faith, hope, and love then God's Beloved Community is powerfully present. Lives change. People are healed. Evil is cast out. Life becomes vibrant and filled with joy.

The Daily Faith Choice Makes All the difference!

Each day you have a choice: fear or faith! I am blessed to have a mentor for this daily choice. My Mom is an excellent teacher without knowing she is teaching. Ever since my Father died in 1991, my Mom has lived on a very meager pension, supplemented by Social Security. She was blessed to have a mortgage free home, but little else. For the last 17 years she has traveled, purchased a car, maintained the home, paid her doctor and dental bills, and not complained. Not once have I heard her fearfully wonder if she will have enough money. However, almost every time I talk with her she affirms her faith in Christ knowing the Christ Jesus will provide for her every need. Each and every day she chooses to reject fear and live by faith in service of Christ. At 88 years of age she still leads a Senior Adult Choir in her church. And, last year, she lead a church based cruise trip through the Panama Canal. Each day, she chooses faith over fear. Our family is blessed to have her witness to the power of faith in Christ.

Living and growing in God's Beloved Community is not age dependent. It's not just for the old. It is for everyone. God's Beloved Community includes men and women, all races and nationalities of the earth, upper class, middle class, and lower class people, the educated and the uneducated. In short, God's Beloved Community has only one requirement: faith in Jesus Christ our Risen Savior.

- Beloved Community people will pray for the strength to daily cast out the techno-fear based greed of this dark world.
- Beloved Community people are concerned with passionate, creative, joyful, building up of God's beloved world.
- Beloved Community people reach out to the panic stricken, lonely, frantic people in the dark world and invite them into solid rock living within the circle of the light of Christ.
- Beloved Community people are not controlled by this world's forces of darkness and fear.

Leonard Sweet offers this challenge to churches and to people who seriously reject the fear based living and daily choose to live a faith based life building up God's Beloved Community. He says:

I am a member of the Church of the Out of Control. I am an out of control disciple. I've given up my control to God. I trust and obey the Spirit. I've jumped off the fence, stepped over the line. I've pulled out all the stops. There's no turning back, looking around, slowing down, backing away, letting up or shutting up. It's a life against the odds, outside the box, over the wall, the game of life played without goal lines other than 'Thy will be done...'

"I am not here to please the dominate culture or to serve any all-show, no-go bureaucracy; I live to please my Lord and Savior. My spiritual taste buds have graduated from fizz and froth to fire and ice. Sometimes I'm called to sharpen the cutting edge and sometimes to blunt the cutting edge. Don't give me that 'old time religion' or even the new time religion. Give me that all time religion that's as hard as rock and soft as snow.

I can't be bought by personalities or perks, positions or prizes. I won't give up, though I may give in...to openness of mind, humbleness of heart, and generosity of spirit. In the face of adversity, I will no longer simply hang in there. I will stand in there; I will run in there. I will pray in there. I will sacrifice in there. I will endure in there, in fact, I will do everything in there *but* hang in there.

My face is upward, my feet are forward, my eyes are focused, my way is cloudy, my knees are worn, my seat uncreased, my heart burdened, my spirit light, my road narrow and my mission wide.

I won't be seduced by popularity, traduced by criticism, travestied by hypocrisy, or trivialized by mediocrity. Just because the show must go on, whether in Hollywood, Washington, Nashville or Denver, doesn't mean the show is worth watching.

I am organized religion's best friend and worst nightmare. I won't back down, slow down, shut down, or let down until I'm preached out, taught out, healed out, or hauled out of God's mission in the world entrusted to the members of the Church of the Out of Control, a mission to unbind the confined, whether they're downtrodden or upscale, overlooked or under-represented.

My fundamental identify is as a disciple of Jesus who lives *in Christ*, who doesn't trek through history simply 'in His steps' but seeks to travel more deeply in *His Spirit*.

Until Christ comes again or calls me home, you will find me *not* killing time so that one day He will pick me out in the lineup of the ages as one of His own. You will find me serving time under the influence and power of His joy, His hope, and His love. And, it will be worth it all to hear Christ's words, the most precious words that I can ever hear: 'You are my beloved child, in whom I am well-pleased. Well done, good and faithful...out of control disciple.'