

Living in a World Full of Fear

Psalm 27

Adam Hamilton writes: "Worry, anxiety, and fear are a part of our daily lives. We worry about the future, about the political situation, and about our health. We fear violent crime, racial divisions, and the future of the economy. Deep rifts in our nation leave us with an increasing sense of uncertainty."

We all have things we fear. And sometimes we have seasons when anxieties and fear simply overwhelm us. Fear is a real and powerful emotion. It is an emotion that is felt by humans all around the world.

Yet one of the most repeated instructions in the Bible is "Do not be afraid." A variation of do not be afraid appears over 140 times in scripture. The Bible gives us examples of how ordinary women and men from the people of Israel to first-century Christians struggle with and deal with fear, teaching us how to find peace in uncertain times.

Fear can keep us from danger and also rob us of the abundant life God created us to live. Fear can lead us to make bad decisions and keep us from taking risks that could have brought great meaning and joy.

How does God teach us to live through our fears and live a life of courage and hope? One starting place is Psalm 27. It begins, "the Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" This is a strong declaration of confidence and hope in a scary world. There is great boldness shown in the first three verses. There are declarations of confidence in conflict, that enemies will stumble and fall, and fear will be vanquished.

The psalmist says my heart shall not fear because he will stay close to God in the house of the Lord and rest in God's shelter in the day of trouble. The psalmist ends with "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!" This psalm is attributed to King David, and he knew what it was to have enemies seeking to kill him; yet, he waited with hope.

In his description of Eden, Martin Luther emphasized that it was a place where there was no fear. There was no fear of dying, no fear of other living beings, no fear of nature. It is a wonderful vision, for we live in a world fraught with fear. However, there is a bold statement to repeat in the face of fear: "I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!" Then we wait and let our hearts take courage.

The story of the Wedding at Cana in John 2:1–11 is a sign about Jesus' identity and mission. Among other things, John shows that in God's world, abundance for the sake of a joyful community will be reality. Abundant fine wine, unexpectedly appearing in the context of scarcity, is a foretaste of what life in Christ is like. There is abundance where there is expected insufficiency. Fear there will not be enough keeps us from living life as we have been created to live.

This Sunday is also the day before Martin Luther King Day. It has been said that the longest-running source of fear in America relates to fear of people of a different color or culture. We are all susceptible to the fear of the other; people who are different than us or who we think will take something from us. Dr. King taught us to be unafraid and to live with courage and hope as we think about how we overcome the fears that keep us from living life abundantly. Addressing prejudice and fear of those different than us, in our communities and within ourselves, is a good place to start.

The question I want us to think about is what worry or fear or anxiety permeates our lives? Can we have the confidence David did in Psalm 27 that God is with us in the midst of our fears? Can we let our hearts take courage and wait for the Lord?

Think about it – Pray about it – Live it

Bob