

Sermon for 19.11.17

I believe the message in the gospel reading is about fear!

The narrative highlights the debilitating effect of fear.

The story focuses on the slave who, like others had been entrusted with a portion of property from the master who went on a journey.

Yet unlike the others who invested and multiplied their portion he buried his portion in the ground for safe keeping , fearing what his master might do if any investment he made – failed.

His fear was very real and quite extreme, for he was even afraid to secure what he had been entrusted with, in a safe place, such as a bank, where some benefit would have been forthcoming without any risk.

Fear can have a paralysing affect.

Fear has a unique power that can prevent one from fulfilling any potential.

Fear has the power to suppress any talents one may have. And today's parable certainly spells that out.

Fear is a very real emotion, and I once heard that fear is the only thing that separates us from God.

Not God from us, because nothing can do that – but ourselves from God.

Fear is lurking somewhere in all negative response to God.

We may be afraid of not being good enough for God's love, perhaps even afraid of being loved, or of being rejected or abandoned.

Perhaps we are afraid of losing our sense of control or of losing our independence. There are many ways we can be held in the grip of fear and kept at a distance from God in our lives.

In the Genesis narrative, after Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden tree, and God met them in the garden –in that very first conversation when God called to them, Adam answered God,

“ I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was **afraid**, because I was naked and I hid myself.”

Fear has been part of our make up from the beginning, according to Genesis.

In the Old Testament **fear** in many ways, is what prevented the people from carrying out God's laws and ordinances.

The people were very much afraid that their God would forsake them and the prophets who were sent to put them on the straight and narrow, and hopefully reduce the fear, were on many occasions stoned, because the people were afraid of what they would say.

So we can see that fear initiates a vicious cycle.

In the New Testament we hear reassurance throughout the gospels and epistles - that we need not fear. When the angel visited Mary to tell her that she would conceive and bear a son, his first words were, do not be afraid! When the angel visited Joseph in a dream after he had decided to dismiss Mary, the angel said, *Joseph do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife.* And we know what happened when the fear was overcome.

Jesus often ministered to his disciples with the words "fear not - I am with you." Apart from reassuring his disciples – Jesus is saying that because of the debilitating power that it can have - fear needs **Not** to be within.

Now all this is not to deny to acknowledge a healthy sense of fear – in itself, fear and the reactions it triggers in our minds and bodies is a kind of signal of which we do well to take note, and then to act appropriately.

For example, it is a sensible precaution to have a small fire extinguisher in the kitchen cupboard, when you live in fear of your chef son's creative cooking methods, and it is a healthy fear that makes us look both ways before crossing the road lest a bus run over one.

In the Old Testament reading this morning, it is fair to say that it was Barak, the commander's sense of **fear** of being defeated, that saved the day.

He wouldn't go into battle without Deborah the prophetess, beside him.

But this healthy sense of fear is not what we are talking about this morning in the gospel passage.

It is rather the fear that can grip us and prevent us from reaching our potential, the fear that can suppress any talents that we have been gifted- it is the fear of the slave in the gospel story this morning.

And we have stories like this in scripture, for God knows about our fearfulness.

That is why the message is always – do not be afraid, because God wants us to live in the joy of fulfilment. Not in the diminishment of fearfulness.

God in his Son, has invited us to love, not fear, for genuine love drives out fear. Love and this type of fear cannot co-exist.

On the practical side of things, one way to deal with fear is that when we recognise it in ourselves, we pray about it.

Seek God's help in discerning from where it comes within. Allow the Holy Spirit to accompany you and guide you, to its source.

The results will ultimately be your newness your transformation in the God who experienced the effects of fear on the cross - and who overcame them in the love of the Father.

Let us pray now to the God who knows all our fears. And I pray this pray in the first person, for each of us.

Dear Lord

When I feel threatened
or believe myself to be a failure
give me courage to enter my still centre,
the place of buried treasure
and sunshine
and solitude
where you are, Lord,
and where it no longer matters
who approves of me
or how successful I am
because you are there,
and, in your presence,
I rediscover the confidence to be me. Amen A.A.

The Lord be with you.

