

## **“A Life Without Fear”**

### **Hebrews 13:1-17**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

What does it mean to be afraid? Everyone is afraid of something. Whether it's things that go “bump in the night,” eight-legged creepy crawlies, slithery snakes, small spaces, fear of disappointment, rejection, fear of losing your faith, or even fear of a demon-possessed psycho bent on the destruction of God's people, everyone has something that makes you pump the brakes and stops you in your tracks. Fear comes upon all of us because it is a result of sin in the world, and as those who bear the sinful flesh, you must contend with it daily. But how? How can you defeat something that is so constantly attacking you everywhere you go? Fear can be utterly paralyzing, making you act in ways that you would never imagine you were capable of in your wildest dreams. In the life of the Christian, faith is your weapon against these fears. To understand what it means to be a child of God in a sinful world, you must first understand what it means to live in a world full of fear, acknowledge the reality that Jesus took all those fears upon himself, and finally how that fear becomes joy in the promise of eternal life in Christ.

To live in a fearful world is to be alive and breathing. Fear surrounds you everywhere you go. It's in your home, your car, the grocery store, at work, and even in church. No matter how much you try to run away from it, it will always find you where you are. And that is because of the sinful nature, the flesh you must bear in this life on earth. You can, however, live a life without fear, when you put your trust in God alone, and abide in His Word. There you will find the true answer to those things that cause you grief. To live a life without fear is to be in the faith, to know with true certainty that God is working all things for your good. As our Epistle lesson states in v 5, the Lord our God “will never leave you or forsake you.” He will provide for you in body and soul, which means that He will also keep you from all harm and danger, as Luther's morning and evening prayers proclaim.

But that idea just doesn't jive with the world. The societal answer to fear is to surround yourself with things of the world. Money, fame, humor, goods, yes-men, and the list goes on and on. Our text this morning warns of that very thing. It doesn't say that money is evil, but not to be consumed with love of money. Do not use it as a weapon against the things of the world that oppress you, thereby making it over and above the God who protects and sustains you in all things. To be afraid and answer that fear with the things of this world is to turn away from the God who created who, who made you in His very image. Though, it is difficult to not be consumed by the desire to protect

yourself from the things you fear. It's not an easy thing to give yourself over to the protection God has for you, because it is a submission to His will, and His will doesn't align with the will of your Old Adam.

And this desire to rely on the self bleeds over into your life of faith many times as well. Certainly, the Lord has given us a brain with which to use our reason and protect ourselves in this world from the dangers and fears which sin perpetuates. There is nothing wrong with preparation and care in providing for the needs and protection of yourself and your family. But when you equate that same "self-preservation" to your faith, you begin to get lost in the world of sin that you are trying to battle.

There is no such thing as "self-preservation," whether we are speaking of what we have and do in the flesh or in the faith. So many try to make everything about themselves. It's all "me, me, me," instead of simply acknowledging the work of Christ. He has taken every fear, every failure, every sin of every person, and has borne them for you to the cross of calvary. You need not fear because He has done all that is necessary to protect you from sin, death, and the devil. And yet, that promise that He has secured on your behalf is not one that is fully realized in this life. You will still be plagued by the realities of sin, tempted to look to earthly things instead of to God, and battling the devil and his demons as they oppress you from the outside.

But you need not fear the devil and his snares, for Christ Jesus, your Lord and Savior, dwells within you. Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." This is not simply a call to live a better life, but to acknowledge the truth that you do not walk this world alone. The life you live in the flesh you live by faith in the Son of God. It is your faith in Jesus that sustains, protects, and nourishes you in this body, and in your soul. All the fears of this life come to nothing at the foot of the cross, where the Almighty has declared them to be powerless and lame in his sight. There is no work for you to do to make that a reality. You do not have to build up to a level of faith that will make that true and so earn the gift He freely gives.

It is such because the Lord has said as much. You are saved not by your works of the Law, because the Law can only condemn, not save. If you live by the Law, then His grace is for nothing. That is what He tells the Pharisees in our Gospel lesson this morning, "Which of you having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?" The ceremonial law which these men follow to their detriment, would cause them to abandon even their own son if they truly abide by it. These things of man which they have given themselves over to have caused them to lose

sight of the redemption and salvation of Yahweh. He has given them life and salvation, and they have made it all about themselves and what they must do in the flesh. The fears and needs they have in life have been assuaged by money, status, and egotistical relevance.

So, Jesus reminds them of the triviality of their so-called laws, and their ineptitude at bringing the benefit of them upon themselves. Their fears remain their own as they bind themselves to a law that was made in response to an improper fear of God. They cannot truly live a life without fear, because they live in constant fear of God's wrath. For you as a Christian, you understand as Paul teaches in Romans, that God's wrath is righteous and just against the unrighteous, and that those who seek to save themselves by the Law have no power to do so. You know that God's wrath against sin is what you deserve, but you have the blessed joy of knowing that Christ has taken all of His wrath in your place. Your fear has become joy in the good news of salvation which is yours because of Jesus' atonement upon the cross.

And for those outside of the faith, they may accuse you of believing in something that brings only despair and grief. How could the death of a man be a relief from fear, sin, death, and the devil? Well, of course, He is not just a man. He is the God-man, Jesus Christ, who in His divine mercy saw fit to come down and experience the fears, sorrows, and pains of the flesh for you. He knows your troubles and your fears because He has felt them in His humanity. That is the blessed joy of the death of Christ. By His death, he has taken everything about our life in the flesh – the sin, guilt, fear, grief, shame, contempt, sorrow – upon Himself, as if they were His very own. As He hung on that cross dying for the sins of the whole world, He knew each one of them that He bled for in that redemptive act.

And the joy of such a thing doesn't end with His death, either. You do not grieve as those who have no hope, or walk this earth as those lost in fear. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! Death could not hold the Son of God in its grasp. He loosed the bonds of death and scattered its power to the four winds so that it can no longer terrify His children. By faith, you have received the benefit of His glory, a glory that is brought forth to you every time you come His table to receive His very body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. In this meal, fear comes to nothing. Death and sin come to nothing. For the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings dwells here bodily for the benefit of your everlasting soul. Here, your fear turns to joy, because by His blood you are cleansed of all failure and fear, all loss and grief, all shame and vice. You receive His forgiveness and walk forth in this life, killing the Old Adam and raising the new man in which Christ dwells.

No matter the fears you face, or the constant failure to appropriately answer that fear, God is still with you. He “will never leave you nor forsake you,” and that is the assurance of the Gospel which you carry with you every day. Faith sustains you in this life. By the Holy Spirit, you have been given the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ, who has taken all of your fears and distractions, all your failures and shortcomings, and made them His own. And, for your sake, He bore those burdens to the cross, to die upon it a gruesome death that assuages all fear and hopelessness. Only the one true God could possibly take on such a task, and He did so willingly that you would be with Him forever in eternity. You see, it is not the ability to protect yourself from fear that keeps you safe, but the love of God in Christ Jesus that guards and protects you from all evil.

The writer to the Hebrews quotes the Psalms of David in verse 6 of our Epistle lesson, “So we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’” Nothing in this world, no conjuring of man that is here because of the sin brought into the world by Adam, is capable of tearing you away from the Lord, your God. He is your ever-present help in trouble and the one who forgives you and delivers you from all evil. You need not fear anything, for Christ has redeemed you a lost and condemned person, brought you into the glorious light of His grace, and given you an eternal inheritance. No matter the variety of things in this world, He is ever constant. He is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. He knows your needs and is powerful to make them a reality. That love is what sustains you in all your fears and allows you to live a life without fear as you await the heavenly glory. Only in Christ, the one who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light, as Peter says, can you find the comfort you seek. And the eternal comfort of His glory is what awaits you. By faith, you trust in the promise that He will raise you to eternal life, to be with Him in His everlasting love and the light of His glory as His face shines upon you in an everlasting life without fear. Amen.