



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Christ has risen. . . . He is Risen Indeed!

There certainly many topics a preacher could go to in these 7 Gospel verses in our text from John this morning. From love, to keeping the word, to sending an Advocate, to teaching you everything, to peace (that's a big one) to predictions about what is to happen to how great the Father is. But this morning I would like to look at one specific line. "Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." This end of verse 27, gives us a command not to fear. Today I think we need to hear that message loud and clear. We need to trust God so we do not fear.

Well, if there was ever a time to fear it was right then in Jesus' day. There was such confusion among Jesus and his disciples as they gathered in the upper room. They took comfort in each other as those on the outside despised the disciples and their leader Jesus. Most folks were suspicious of them and many people hated them for following such a leader. After all Jesus broke many of the Jewish customs. He dishonored their Sabbath by healing on that day. He ate with sinners. He healed an adulteress. He told the people he was alive even before Abraham. He said he was the Son of God. He said His father was greater than all their patriarchs and prophets. People were so unhappy with Jesus, even his hometown folks would not listen to Him and tried to hurl him off a cliff. And this is the

man, Jesus, that these disciples have committed their lives too. He tells them that when he dies on a Roman cross, they should not be afraid. Yah, right!

But as long as Jesus is around, they do feel a sort of comfort and safety. Jesus tells them again that He is about to leave them alone. Alone to fend for themselves. Alone to face the maddened crowds. So how could they not be afraid?

Well, Jesus promises to send them an Advocate, the Holy Spirit. But they do not quite understand. They are not listening. But these disciples are too worried about the here and now. They cannot imagine life without their leader. They cannot see past the nose on their faces if you will.

But then the time comes, for the nails in Jesus' hands and feet and his excruciating death on that cross. It was a death of passion on the part of their Lord, but the people saw it as retribution for all his deeds against the Jewish way of life. And Jesus was willing to die this horrible death to fulfill his purpose on earth. And the disciples witness this horror as they try to remember the words of Jesus, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." If ever there was a time to fear it was then.

And I suspect we could say the very same today. If ever there was a time to fear it was 9/11 that brought a vicious attack on our country. Thousands of innocent people died in a horrific senseless attack. Thousands were injured. Tens of thousands of people mourned for them all as our country was violated. Things would never be the same again. Fear and anger are still results of that awful day and our lives will never be the same again. Gone are the days of innocence. But very present even today, some 20 plus years later, is the fear, fear that an attack such as that can happen again.

This week we witnessed more hate filled attacks. One in a grocery store in Buffalo, New York where people were killed innocently buying groceries or working in the store. Last week after a Bucks playoff game in Milwaukee there were 2 men who shot people partying in the Deer District. A shooter in California shot at people while they were in school. What on earth is this world coming too? How do we deal with events like the bombings at the

end of the Boston Marathon? How do we deal with today's war in Ukraine? How do we deal with all this terror? We are not only saddened but we are scarred. We fear for our lives and for our loved ones.

And then you add in COVID 19, and fear raises its ugly head again. Fear of getting the disease and having long lasting complications or worse, dying. Fear that the vaccines won't work or do more damage in our bodies. For over two years many have been afraid to leave their home. Fear crippled our society in many ways.

Watching our investments dwindle as the stock market takes a dive is another thing that today causes concern. Gas prices are at an all-time high. Groceries prices are up significantly. How will we make ends meet? We are fearful of what the future holds.

Those of us who have grandchildren fear for their future. What kind of a life will they have with all that is going on? And what can we do about any of it? Revenge against the terrorists is not the answer. Stricter guns laws may not help. Closing the lab in China where they believe Covid was started won't help. Basically, the cat is out of the bag folks. All the revenge and retribution in the world will gain us nothing. We cannot let fear guide us or trust me, there will be another toilet paper shortage. Don't get me wrong, there is still a lot of good in the world, but it is too often overshadowed by the evil that causes us fear. Just watch the evening news. And then try to live by the advice of our Lord, Jesus, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

I am one to believe that a bit of fear is good. When we first got horses while we were living in Hartford, we were novices. My best friend Nancy and my sister, Gail were our mentors. They both knew a lot about horses. And I have to admit that my experience with them was limited to being thrown years prior by my sister's favorite horse Charlie Brown. From that time on and even handling Methara and Sunflower in our own back year, I always had a touch of fear. I preferred to call it "Healthy respect" for these amazing animals. That sort of

fear or faintheartedness is good and was my way of protecting myself and Leigh and Frank. It helped keep me on my toes and my children safe.

Fear is a normal human emotion, but many times it can also be unwarranted. A story I read a long time ago about a plane and a pilot goes like this: A plane landed after a long flight. The flight attendant explained that there would be time for everyone to get off the aircraft and then reboard in 90 minutes.

Probably prior to 9/11, everyone got off the plane except one gentleman. The pilot had notice him as he walked by. He could tell that the man was blind because his guide dog lay quietly underneath the seat next to him. "Sir", the pilot said to the blind man, we will be here for more than an hour. Would you like to get off the plane and stretch your legs?" The blind man replied, "No thanks, but my dog would like to stretch his legs." So the pilot took the dog, grabbed his bag and his sunglasses and went out the exit door. Imagine the fear of the people at the gate when this pilot wearing his sunglasses walked off the plane with a guide dog. I bet they were scrambling to rebook their flights on a different plane. You see fear took control, even though it was unwarranted.

And silly as this story seems, we do this all the time. We fear to leave our homes and cars unlocked. We fear failure at work and tirelessly scramble to work harder. Parents fear for the safety of their children. Fear of the future is common but there is still no place for fear in our lives. Fear brings with it anxiety, worry, apprehension, tension. None of those things are what God wants for us. They do not lead to peace, calm, stress-free living we are called to.

And so, Jesus is talking about fear to his disciples and to us. In this text, I think that Jesus is talking about the sort of fear that freezes and immobilizes a person. The type of fear Jesus warns against is that fear that leaves you feeling hopeless and defeated. Jesus does not want any of his children to feel this way. Jesus died on the cross so we would have life abundant and true hope of everlasting life. An abundant life is a life of faith, faith that we can make the world a better place. Our response to the world should be one of kindness, one of love and one of caring. We are in charge of how we respond to acts that would

generate fear as a response. But instead, we are to love and show love to our neighbors out of our faith in the one true savior, Jesus. That sort of courage to go on in face of dangerous situations comes only from Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is his answer to walking into the world in faith that things are not hopeless, that there will be a better end, a joyful end.

The promise of peace and joy comes from knowing that nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. God's love is more powerful than any act of terrorism or fear of situations that we might encounter. Faith in God's plan for our world is way too big for us to comprehend. We simply trust that by His only Son's death and resurrection, our future is secure.

AMEN

Christ has risen. . . . He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!