

Sunday, August 15, 2021

Genesis 3:1-12 Proverbs 1:7 and Matthew 14:22-33

### “The Three Greatest Fears”

We continue our summer series “At Your Request” with requests of topics from some of our church members. Today’s focus is on The Three Greatest Fears in life. Just for a moment please consider what causes you to be afraid- to have fear- to truly get your heart racing, palm sweating for a few minutes and then afterwards you are calm again. Not talking about an anxious moment, but of what are you afraid?

Phobias have existed for years, but to truly be fearful means we are afraid physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Intellectually we might analyse situations and this aids in dissipating our fears; the fear remains, it is just as not as intense. Fears and phobias do exist so just consider for a moment- of what are you fearful?

Dr Billy Graham spoke of three greatest fears during several of his crusade gatherings throughout his ministry. Each time he spoke of these fears, he introduced the topic by describing current events of the times and how fear seemed to be rampant because of what was happening around the world—wars, famine, drought, and migration.

Today we hear world news at an even faster pace and as a result, people carry these stories most often filled with destruction and loss for longer periods of time, that is until the next story breaks. Most often what is presented is about something gone wrong be it with climate change, political leaders falling from truth, or how some group or nation of people is hurting. But in these last 18 months, the people of the world as a whole have been in this pandemic together, leaving many people living and dying in fear. Many of these fears come from irritability, anxiety and depression which rose exponentially because of the pandemic. These fears have grown and people seem to be more afraid than before.

What are the three greatest fears? The first one surrounds the ultimate enemy we all must face- death. We will all die and the hope is that when the time comes it will be a peaceful death unlike the thousands of deaths witnessed through television shows or movies which seem to simplify the impact of death on people. What happens after we die? Where do we go and what is the ultimate punishment or reward? For those who have not lead a positive life, what they are living is a personal hell; that is self judgment of not being accepted. But is this really what is being feared? Are people really living in hell, or dying without certainty of where one will go due to sins of the past and the question of forgiveness.

This might be because the story of The Fall has been shared, but in a cartoon life manner. We read from Genesis 3 how Adam and Eve were living in Eden that is, paradise. But then they chose to follow the words of the serpent and ate the fruit of the tree which God told them not to do. They disobeyed God even though the tree produced good tasting fruit but the tree was filled with knowledge- both good and evil. Until this time, evil had not entered God’s

creation but through the serpent Satan offered the critical choice. As a result of their sharing the fruit, Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden by God. They were also subject to punishment for having disobeyed with each receiving new roles that included labour. But as a result of sin, they were now subject to death. Up until this time, Adam and Eve were to live forever with God but because of disobedience, death became a part of life. A part of this dying is the source of fear: where do we go when we die? We know that there is a separation of body and spirit; bodies are placed in the earth, but our spirit? This is what many people fear. Reward- heaven with God/ or punishment hell? IS this the greatest fear? Or is the greatest fear when one realizes that God is a stranger?

When we are in need and we cry out to God, "Help me" do we muffle our words because we are unsure of what to say? Are we uncertain where we need to walk and stumble in the dark because of this?

Just what is fear? Fear is an emotion marked by dread and concern- we don't know what will happen because of the sights, sounds and unknown story ahead- like a scary movie. Fear is also a gift that comes from within- a gut instinct. By knowing oneself, we learn to recognize various warning signs and precursors to violence, it becomes possible to avoid potential trauma and harm, if we just recognize this fear. Yet showing fear may also be inclusive of a moment of awe and profound reverence which inspires trust and confidence. This is 'The fear of the Lord.'

The prophet Isaiah wrote "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (53:6) When we are afraid we move in all directions; we bump into each other and for many, we cannot find our way home. Fear is in front of us no matter which way we face. Out in the field, a shepherd will call to his sheep; they will hear his voice and they will follow the sound whether in daylight or darkness, to a safe place. Do we know the Shepherd? We listen to the story of Jesus' life, teachings, death and resurrection we might know that he is the Good Shepherd but do we/ do you know him as the one who leads you safely home?

Do you experience the second greatest fear which is wandering in the darkness and unsure of your path home? This fear is of not knowing the path to experience eternal life with God. It is living in the darkness when Jesus still calls out to us. It is living in the darkness when the light and message of Jesus has been shared for over 2000 years! It is not knowing who Jesus is for he will be the One who will call you to follow and follow him. Jesus knows the way to God the Father, because he is of God. It is never too late to hear Christ's call. Any day is a great day for a spiritual awakening and this could be your day to live without fear for tomorrow!

In our reading from Matthew 14, we join Jesus and the disciples after the feeding the crowd of 5000+ people! Jesus tells the disciples to go to the other side of the lake by getting into the boat. He stayed behind to dismiss the crowd and take some time by himself. Jesus was very tired after teaching, performing a miracle and just wanted to be alone and pray. Evening

came and he could see that the boat was out a great distance in the lake so he stayed put and rested. However, early in the morning, Jesus got up and as he made his way to the boat carrying his close friends he walked on the water. When the disciples looked out on the water, they were terrified, shouting, "It is a ghost." They cried out in fear. But when Jesus spoke to them with his familiar voice, they calmed down a little. Peter was not sure, and asked, "if it is really you, command me to come to you on the water." Peter wanted Jesus to help him learn this amazing pool party trick. Jesus obliges by telling him, "Come". Peter does something that often we won't do when confronted in fear, he actually took the first step- and got out of the boat. He started walking on the water and was going toward Jesus. He was walking on water. But then he noticed the wind about him, and he became afraid. He was sinking into the water and cried out to Jesus, "Save me." He needed his Lifesaver- as he was afraid of drowning in the lake. Jesus reached out his hand, caught him, and said, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat the wind calmed down. The disciples who watched all of this from the boat worshiped Jesus and said, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Just reflect on this for a moment. Peter trusted Jesus and took the first step in getting out of the boat. He actually took a few steps on top of the water. His focus was on only Jesus. But when he became more aware of what he was doing and felt the wind and realized that he was in the middle of the lake walking on water. Then he looked away and this was when he began to sink. He had taken his eyes off Jesus. He lost focus on following the One who told him to come. He began to sink and fear caught up with him.

As long as Peter was focusing on Jesus he had no fear. When he was distracted by the wind he realized what was going on and he began to sink. This is the same for us as well. Our fears will rise when we are not focused on Jesus. But when we focus our lives on Him, we will never be separated from him.

This is the third greatest fear- to be separated and alone. Separated from the ones we love and feeling alone. Many people have experienced this separation from family through the lockdowns. People living in communities of thousands and millions of people have stated again and again that they are alone. We are human and we need each other. We need to be connected with other people. Jesus spent much time with his disciples but there was also time he needed to be alone. This is what we need to learn to do again—put this into balance- time with others and time alone. With others we can learn and laugh and grow; alone we can pray and come to know Christ in new ways. Ways that truly alleviate fear—fully trusting in Jesus and counting on him to guide us throughout our lives.

Atheists see only a hopeless end to life, but if we believe in Christ and live following his teachings, we can see and experience endless hope. Job knew God, he experienced his presence and he declared, "I know my redeemer lives." He had nothing - all had been lost; but his faith in God was strong.

How afraid are you? And what can you do about it? As Christians we are to do three things: 1) Do you believe in God? Is your focus on Christ or are you sinking? Refocus your heart and mind on Christ and come to him so you will change your life. Enable your faith to win over your fears. 2) Commit your life to Jesus and show you believe in what you say and do. Not just in one moment of a day; but every day. Everything you say and do should be to God's glory because you have received the gift of life and you are living it following Christ's way to love. 3) Follow, serve and grow in your faith. For when you do this- you have no reason to fear anything. What we often fear is developed in our minds; but God created everything. So let us turn our lives to him; and live without fear.

Let us remember this- What is Fear? False Evidence Appearing Real. It is the appearance of what is real that causes us much worry, anxiety and even lost sleep and stress. It comes from our own thoughts and it is up to us to refocus on Christ. He will not let you sink! Even though we cannot control how we feel, we have the power to choose how we think and act.

God told Adam and Eve that they had sinned. We are sinners too. But it is through Jesus that we have nothing to fear-for if we believe in Him, our faith will over power all our fears. This is the good news in Jesus. Because he rose from death to new life, we have nothing to fear. We know where we will go at the time of our earthly death; and Christ holds our future. This is our faith in action. This is our faithful response for like Job, we know that our redeemer lives. Thanks be to God.

PRAYER. It may seem different to thank you for the gift of fear, but God in your love for us we learn to grow in faith once we overcome the greatest fears we have as people. Through faith we are stronger than any of our fears, through faith we can overcome all which frightens us if we just keep our eyes on Jesus. We praise you and thank you for your Son Jesus. Hear now the prayers of our hearts as we give over our fears to you and receive the gift of your grace and everlasting hope. SILENCE> God we praise you. Help us O God to be faithful and to fully trust you now and in the days ahead. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.