

Dear members and friends of St. John,

Fear is an interesting study in human nature. The TV show "Fear Factor" placed contestants in a variety of situations that would make them confront a variety of fears. Certain events would make contestants move across an obstacle course suspended high above the ground. Other events required that they eat insects and other disgusting things. If they 'chickened out' and couldn't complete the event, they were disqualified. The winner of each episode was congratulated by the host with these words, "fear obviously wasn't a factor for you."

But **very few people can honestly say that 'fear isn't a factor' in their lives.** The fear of heights, the fear of the dark, the fear of germs, the fear of flying – these are all common fears that can paralyze an otherwise normal, rational human being. Why? Psychologists point out that some fear in a person is good. Fear prevents a person from doing dangerous things that could lead to injury or death. Unfortunately, for many, fear often becomes irrational and not associated with any imminent or reasonable threat of illness, injury or death. For instance, statistically speaking, you are more than a 1000 times more likely to get killed driving to and from the airport than being killed in a commercial airplane crash. And yet thousands of people wouldn't think of going near an airplane, and instead drive to their intended destination – taking a far greater risk of being killed than if they had flown.

Often, the greatest fear that people face isn't even associated with risk factors associated with illness, accident or death. **What many people fear the most is change.** People learned to associate the *status quo* with safety and security. Going to the same job, day after day, eating the same breakfast food, living in the same house or apartment – people find comfort in the routines of life. The disciples of Jesus had grown to like the security and routine of following their rabbi around for three years. Yes, there had been the terrifying moments on the Sea of Galilee, once with Jesus sleeping in the back of the boat, and the other when Jesus had launched them out on their own, only to find themselves in the middle of a terrifying storm. But Jesus rescued them from both situations, and life must have fallen into a rhythm that soothed even the timid souls among them.

Then things seemed to change dramatically. From that unexpected encounter with Elijah and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration, things seemed to begin changing in the life of their Master. Events spiraled downward as Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time. Jesus had warned them in advance that **change was going to happen** – that He must die at the hands of sinful men. But they didn't know what to make of such talk. People find comfort in denial – refusing to accept the thought that things might be changing from the status quo. It's possible that the disciples didn't want to confront the possibility that Jesus would perish, and simply refused to listen. But there was no denying the events of that Friday morning, as Jesus carried His cross toward the city gate. How could this be happening to the Messiah – the redeemer of Israel? When Jesus breathed His last on the cross, and His Spirit was given up, who could escape the reality of this? **And what happens to us when things in our world get turned upside down – we recoil in fear.** The disciples were no different – they retreated to a safe haven, and hid themselves behind a locked door in fear of having to carry their own crosses.

Now, we can begin to see why the most common command issued from the lips of Jesus was “Fear not!” Paralyzing fear accomplishes exactly what Satan desires – people recoil and hide, and God’s plan for them is thwarted. Jesus comes to the locked room to find his disciples cowering in fear. He comforts them with “Peace be with you!” He breathes on them the Holy Spirit, and prepares them to go out and build the Church. **Fear is replaced with faith.** Timidly behavior is replaced with boldness. THE DISCIPLES BECOME APOSTLES AS THEY STEP OUT IN FAITH. They go to the same Temple where Jesus was tried before the Sanhedrin, and they boldly and publicly proclaim Jesus as Lord! You see, the antidote for fear is indeed faith in Jesus Christ. Fear is a lack of faith in our living God – it always is! And when we hide in fear, our ability to be a light to a darkened world diminishes. We can’t step out in faith because we’re afraid of what might happen to us.

Over the years, I’ve seen my share of fear. I’ve seen it in the eyes of person in the hospital after he received a prognosis from the doctor. I’ve seen it in the eyes of people when they’ve lost their jobs. Anything that changes the status quo can lead to fear – but does it always have to?

People with strong faith face sudden changes in life with much less fear. Why? Because they know that there is nothing that their Lord and Savior can’t overcome for them. That’s right – even death will be overcome by our Lord who intercedes for us with the Father. We were buried with Jesus in our Baptism, and we will be raised to new life through the miracle of His resurrection. With the empty tomb in mind, is there anything that life can throw at us that our Lord can’t overcome? The answer is a resounding, “No!”

So how do we go about getting this strong faith that shuts down fear? God’s Means of Grace: His Word and Sacraments. Do you read your Bible daily? Do you attend an adult Bible study? Do you attend worship each week, receiving the Lord’s Supper when it’s offered? We can live with much less fear – we can experience joy even in the midst of great change – but God has to move from an occasional after-thought during your day, to a place of honor and importance in your life. Wouldn’t this be worth it – to see your fears diminish – and peace and joy increase? Wouldn’t it be worth it to face each new day knowing that there is nothing that can happen that will separate us from the love that is Christ Jesus? Imagine your life with much less fear. Our Lord will provide it – He promises to do so. So “fear not” and begin enjoying each day. It’s what your loving God wants for you!

Pastor Travis