

“A Great Fear Came” | Rev. Tim Frickenschmidt | 3rd Sunday after Pentecost (6/13/2021)

Proverbs 21:1-6: 13

21:2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart ...
21:6 The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death ...

Acts 4:36 – 5:11

4:37 [Joseph] sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet. ...

5:1 Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ²and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back ... some of the proceeds, and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet. ³But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? ... You have not lied to man but to God.” ⁵When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶The young men ... carried him out and buried him.

5:7 After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸And Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.” And she said, “Yes, for so much.” ⁹But Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the LORD? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out.” ¹⁰Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her <and> carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹And a great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard these things.

Luke 19:1-10

19:2 And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich ... ⁵And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” ⁶So he turned and came down and received him joyfully. ... <read the whole passage>

Introduction Consider that the church of God is an intricate network of intimate relationships in which we have the freedom to be honest and open and vulnerable. As an example, Tim retold the infamous story of the inadvertently risqué bathing suit he wore to his “welcome the new pastor” get together 15 years ago. It is in the context of these intimate relationships that the story of Ananias and Sapphira can be understood. The story reveals God’s acute holiness, man’s greedy deceit and the nature of the holy fear that we should all feel in God’s presence.

Background

Luke makes the first reference to “the church” in this passage, and Tim pointed out that it is functioning just as the temple always had. It was a place of forgiveness (with Christ’s sacrifice replacing animal sacrifice), healing (with the apostles’ healing replacing the priest’s role in the temple) and God’s indwelling (with the Holy Spirit’s “filling” of believers at Pentecost replacing the many references to “filling” in the Old Testament (notably II Chronicles 7). God’s “acute holiness” is such an overwhelming beauty that it reveals and magnifies blemishes.

As Tim pointed out, though, it is not the “blemish” of greed that is most significant here. Greed could be dealt with in a variety of ways. It is the deceitful greed that is the problem; the desire to hide the greed by lying. This deceit is incompatible with the intimacy that is supposed to be part of the church community, and God is declaring here that He will protect the community from such deceit. Tim went on to relate the sad story of his college pastor who lied continually about his sexual sin before eventually being caught. The longer the lie goes on, the more hurt is caused to the rest of the community.

This should lead us to fear not the truth about who we are, but the truth about who God is. If we admit the truth about ourselves, we experience God’s overwhelming love for us. This Biblical fear is essentially positive – an overwhelming sense of awe, wonder and reverence that comes upon us when we consider God’s character. Jesus called Zacchaeus to stop hiding and come down from the tree, because He was about to be raised on a “tree” to reconcile Zacchaeus and all the rest of us to God. And note that Zacchaeus came down “joyfully” and repented actively of his “blemish” (greed).

Discuss:

- 1.) What “blemishes” has the Lord’s acute holiness revealed in your life? And how are you tempted to “hide” from God or others?
- 2.) How do you practice “deceit” in your daily life? How do you rationalize this practice? What is it about the truth that you fear?
- 3.) How can meditating on God’s love for you develop a “holy fear” that can call you down from your place of hiding? And what would that look like for you?
- 4.) How can you relate to others in the church community in a way that encourages them to be more honest, open and vulnerable?

Conclusion/Application

Consider those in your life who would be hurt by your deceit. Recall that God already knows everything (Jeremiah 23:24).