

“When We’re Afraid” | Rev. Tim Frickenschmidt | May 10, 2020

**Psalm 56 Selections**

Be gracious to me, O God...When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?... You have kept count of my tossing(s); put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.

**1 Peter 4**

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you...But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s suffers, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed...But let none of you suffer as a murderer of a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. yet if anyone suffers a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

**John 21**

“...but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.... ‘Follow me.’” When Peter saw [John], he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!”

**Intro Question**

When we encounter the resurrected Jesus, how do you respond? Doubt, hopelessness, shame—all responses that Jesus meets in-person. What about fear? Does Jesus ever say that Peter’s fear is illegitimate? Are we afraid? During “quarantide,” it’s been reported that 80,000 have died from the Corvid-19 and the unemployed make up 20–25% of the work force. Like the dramatized words of the FBI negotiator in the altercation with the Branch Davidians of Waco remind us, fear moves us. “...When you find out what someone is afraid of, you can get them to do anything.” What do you fear? Where is what you fear leading you?

**Background**

Jesus has just restored Peter out of shame into action and they again begin to walk the path as teacher and student. Before long, Jesus unburdens Peter of a monkey on his back that would keep Peter from Jesus. This time it’s fear.

In the same way Jesus forthtold his own death, Peter learns from his lord that he will meet the same suffering. Peter balks at the particularity of this promise. So, he asks about John’s end. Jesus gives no answer. His presence is enough for Peter to trust. More than scalpel removal of his fear, Peter is invited by Jesus, “Follow me.”

**Discuss:**

1.) PETER IN THE FACE OF FEAR

Jesus redefines the relationship. We’ve seen Peter: refuse a foot-washing from Jesus, tell Jesus that he shouldn’t have to suffer, attempt to kill a man and frantically miss only by cutting off another’s ear. Finally, Peter denies that he knows Jesus and flees. By avoiding suffering and even embarrassment, Peter has worked to define relationship with Jesus on his own terms. Now Jesus will take away the defining fear of death, of which suffering and embarrassment, are shadows. Jesus tells Peter how he will die: against his will, not on his terms. John explains with his parenthetical that sounds like Jesus saying, “Peter, your self-directed life is now over. When you are older, people will kill you.” Peter wrestles with the promise well by asking Jesus and yet asks too far, “What about John?”. Jesus leaves the question unanswered by assuring Peter that the answer is for him and not Peter to know. As Jesus finds Peter wanting to make demands and put terms on his faith in Jesus, He graciously says no. Jesus is the sovereign that entrusts stewardship to his own, while at the same time is LORD of every sphere. When terms and questions act as tools of control (instead of prayer, in Christ), such grasping will skewer our soul. Jesus will not have it.

2.) JESUS IN THE FACE OF FEAR

Instead, Jesus issues an invitation. Like a benevolent trainer—with an aggressive dog looking for a fight it won’t win—Jesus redirects Peter’s attention to himself, his resurrected self—the best, most persuasive, delicious, and beautiful gift. “Follow me.” And again, “You, follow me!” Jesus, the resurrected Christ, is the answer to every question, the meaning of meaning, and the silver lining to every dark cloud of suffering. Life thru death. His presence is the promise and the point. “Take my yoke (read: cross) upon you and learn from me because my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” And in the words of Aslan from the Narnia stories, when Eustace needs his monstrous scales removed in order to bath in the waters of new life, “You will have to let me undress you.” We might not follow the crucified Jesus without bearing our own cross. There is no gospel without suffering, no glory without suffering. There is no open tomb without the cross. Control is a lie. The powerless who suffer with faith have Christ and his gifts: perseverance, joy, and glory.

**Questions and Prayer**

- 1.) What control has been lost to the Covid-19 pandemic? What fears have resulted or persisted?
- 2.) If Jesus seems to think that he is enough and if his simple command to follow is what he offers, do you trust him right now?
- 3.) Does suffering necessitate meaning? Does everything happen for a reason?

By the blood and in the strong name of Jesus, Father, let the bones that you have broken rejoice. By your Spirit, grant us the gusto of Jesus to yell our prayers when suffering is unbearable, the faith of Jesus to stand quiet before false accusers, and the joy of Jesus to sing a hymn of praise to you with friends, at the edge of demise.

By Isaac Banegas