

Have you ever been afraid? Of course, you have. Is anyone in the room afraid to fly?

A woman on a flight was suffering from the jitters. This was not her first flight, but still she had never been able to relax while flying on a plane. It didn't help that her current flight was delayed twice before getting off the ground because of mechanical problems. Then, after they were aloft, the lights began flickering. "Oh, no," she thought, "something else is wrong with this plane. I knew I shouldn't have taken this flight." She mentioned the flickering lights to a flight attendant. **"I'll take care of it," the flight attendant said.** Imagine this woman's surprise when moments later all the lights in the plane went out. The plane was in total darkness except for emergency lighting. **Clearly the flight attendant had solved the problem of the flickering lights. She had simply turned them all off.**

A passenger across the aisle who had heard the woman mention the flickering lights to the flight attendant leaned over and said, **"Whatever you do, please don't mention anything to that flight attendant about a problem with the engines."**

Most of us realize that fear of flying is irrational. Statistically, flying is one of the safest ways to travel. But still, for some of us, it is a helpless feeling being thousands of feet in the air, dependent on a couple of motors to keep us there.

One of sport's best-known personalities was notorious for being afraid to fly. Does anyone remember the name John Madden? Madden is a big, tough, former football player in the National Football League, a former Super Bowl-winning head coach with the Oakland Raiders, and a former commentator for the NFL. He is best known, perhaps, among younger football fans for his long-running Madden NFL video game series. **And yet John Madden is deathly afraid of flying.** Many might know he had a specially outfitted private bus to carry him from coast to coast for football telecasts.

Someone once asked him why he is afraid to fly. Madden confided it was something that happened years ago at an airport. Airports used to have machines where you could buy flight insurance just before you boarded your plane. **Madden says that once while he was standing in line at the insurance policy machine, he noticed there were three pilots ahead of him waiting to buy insurance, as well. That might make you and me just as nervous as well!!!**

ALL OF US ARE AFRAID OF SOMETHING. It may be cancer, or if you are of a certain age, Alzheimer's. It may be losing your job or being deserted by your spouse. It may concern the safety of your children or simply looking silly in front of others. **But all of us know what it is to be afraid.**

As humorist Dave Barry once put it, "All of us are born with a set of instinctive fears--of falling, of the dark, of lobsters, of failing in front of others..."

Fear and anxiety are part of living. During his 1933 Inaugural Address, President Franklin Roosevelt sought to calm a troubled America in the throes of a depression by saying, "There is nothing to fear but fear itself."

I wonder what Roosevelt would say today in all that we are facing in today's world? Certainly, there is enough to be afraid of besides fear: violence in the schools, random mass murders, terrorism, COVID, THE WAR IN UKRAINE WITH RUSSIA, the deterioration of our environment. Yes, the lists go on and on...

The disciples of Jesus knew what it was to be afraid. Our lesson for the day from John's Gospel, begins like this: ***"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders . . ."***

The disciples were afraid . . . and with good reason. Their Master had been crucified. They feared that the same thing would happen to them. Even though there had been reports that he had been resurrected, they were still wrestling with what that meant. They remained in seclusion and were meeting under the cover of night, secretly, behind locked doors.

Sometimes, we too live in fear and lock ourselves away behind metaphorically closed doors. *For the last 2 years we all know what it is like to live behind "LOCKED DOORS."* We might say that the disciples lacked faith but let us put ourselves in their position. They faced imminent danger from the civic and religious authorities. They needed reassurance that everything would be okay. We understand their predicament. There are times we need reassurance as well.

We would like to think that Easter Sunday solved all the disciples' fears and doubts. **It did not.** Over the fifty days after Easter until the Day of Pentecost the disciples struggled mightily to accept the reality of the resurrection. **Experiencing new life did not happen overnight just as it often doesn't happen that way for us either.**

But listen as the story continues, *"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them . . ."*

IN THE MIDST OF THEIR "FEAR AND CONFUSION" CHRIST CAME TO THEM. Even though the *doors were locked*, he came and stood among them. This shows something about the nature of his new resurrected body-- walls were no obstacle to him--**but it also instructs us that no matter what walls and doors we hide behind, Jesus is able to come to us with his LOVING CARE.** He is able to reach us behind the walls where we have hidden ourselves. He is able to dispel our fears and meet us right at the point of our need. **Nothing is too difficult for him.**

In the midst of their fear and confusion, Christ came to them. If you could hold on to that truth, you could handle most of life's anxieties.

Dennis Guernsey, in his book *If I'm So Free?? How Come I Feel Boxed In?* tells about a psychologist who was watching a little girl come skipping out of a church office on her way back to her classroom. Evidently, she had been sent on an errand by her day school teacher, and she was reporting back to her class as ordered.

The distance from the church office to her classroom was about 100 feet. As she skipped, she chanted a little saying to keep herself in step: *"My mommy loves me . . . my daddy loves me . . . my teacher loves me . . . my grandma loves me . . . God loves me . . . Jesus loves me . . ."* She felt loved, says Dennis Guernsey, 100 feet worth of love.

The psychologist watching her take this journey commented, *"I wish my patients felt just one/tenth of the love she feels. What a difference it would make in their lives."*

That would be a good CHANT for anyone who is about to succumb to a burden of fear. *"God loves me . . . Jesus loves me . . ."* Nothing can separate us from that love. **Walls can't do it . . . locked doors can't do it . . . "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"** writes St. Paul in Romans 8:38-39. **AND IT IS SO TRUE!!**

The most potent CURE TO FEAR IS...our FAITH in God.

Dr. E. Stanley Jones, one of the great Christians of the twentieth century, put it like this:

"I see that I am inwardly fashioned for faith and not for fear. Fear is not my native land, faith is. I am so made that worry and anxiety are sand in the machinery of life. Faith is oil. I live better by faith and confidence than by fear and doubt and anxiety. In anxiety and worry my being is gasping for breath. These are not my native air . . . We do not know why it is that worriers die sooner than non-worriers. But that is a fact. But I who am simple of mind think I know," writes E. Stanley Jones. *"We are inwardly constructed in nerve and tissue and brain cell and soul for faith and not fear. God made us that way. To live by worry is to live against reality."*

While the disciples were there cowering behind LOCKED DOORS, Jesus stood among them and said, *"Peace be with you!"* After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. *"The disciples were overjoyed,"* says the Gospel of John, *"when they saw the Lord."*

It wasn't Christ's words that reassured the disciples, but "HIS PRESENCE." It was knowing he was alive. What was it that Bill and Gloria Gaither wrote? "Because he lives, I can face tomorrow . . ." And that's true of us all.

If we know within our hearts that our Redeemer lives, we can walk with confidence regardless of our situation.

Some of you will remember Elizabeth Kubler/Ross who was the closest thing we've had to an expert on death and ministry to the dying. Kubler/Ross once showed a group of seminary students a drawing that a child had made. The child had terminal cancer but refused to talk to anyone, **withdrawing behind a wall of silence. The only communication offered by this child was through his drawings.**

This particular drawing that she showed to the class had a beautiful little cottage set off to the side of the paper. Above the cottage was a bright, brilliant sun shining. Surrounding the cottage was a beautiful lawn with flowers and trees. In front of the cottage was a family of four: a mother, a father, and two children at play.

In the center of the paper, however, stood a tiny figure facing a large army tank which was bearing down upon him--about to run him down. Obviously, the tiny figure represented the dying child who saw himself helpless before a gigantic force which was about to destroy him. Dr. Ross asked the group of students, **"How could you help this child communicate his fears? How could you offer him comfort?"** Two students answered her challenge. One student drew a picture of a figure holding a stop sign in front of the tank. But this did nothing to soothe the child when it was shown to him. **However, the second seminarian drew another person in the picture.** And the person was doing nothing more, nothing less, than simply standing by the little child who was facing the gigantic force, **HOLDING THE HAND OF THE CHILD.** And that broke the wall of silence and enabled the child finally to pour out all his pent-up feelings.

All the little fellow needed was to know someone was with him. He wasn't alone.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Why were they overjoyed? They knew they were no longer ALONE. Their situation was still troubling. Their lives were still in danger. But they would not face it alone. **CHRIST WAS WITH THEM.**

And that's the Good News of the day for us as well. **SOMEONE IS BESIDE US...HOLDING OUR HAND.** Regardless of whatever force may be sent against us, we will prevail. **HOW/WHY??**

THE LORD IS ALIVE!!! He will not forsake us. **"Because he lives, we can face tomorrow; because he lives all fear is gone . . ."**

Thank God. He is alive. Amen.