

"WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
June 17, 1990

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INTRODUCTION

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"You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear....but you have received the spirit of Sonship"

The question for this morning is this: what is it that you are afraid of?

Our little friend, Charlie Brown, in the comic strip, "Peanuts" knows about fear. "I've developed a new philosophy," he said. "I only dread one day at a time."

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"I think lunchtime is about the worst time of the day for me. Always having to sit here alone. Of course, sometimes mornings aren't so pleasant, either - waking up and wondering if anyone would really miss me if I never got out of bed. Then there's the night, too - lying there and thinking about all the stupid things I've done during the day. And all those hours in between - when I do all those stupid things.

Well, lunchtime is among the worst times of the day for me. Well, I guess I'd better see what I've got. (He opens the bag, unwraps a sandwich and looks inside). Peanut butter. (He bites and chews). Some psychiatrists say that people who eat peanut butter sandwiches are lonely. I guess they're right. And if you're really lonely, the peanut butter sticks to the roof of your mouth".

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You may have heard the story about the doctor who received a frantic call from a woman early one morning. She said:

"Doctor...you've got to come right over immediately. It's my husband. When he got up this morning he took his vitamin pill, his ulcer pill, his tranquilizer pill, his anti-histamine pill, his appetite depressant pill and added just a little dash of Benzedrine - and he lit a cigarette and there was this terrible explosion".

Some people live in constant fear that somewhere "out there" is something tragic that is going to happen to them or someone they love. A man was awakened by his wife. She heard a burglar downstairs. He slowly got up and went grumpily downstairs, and found himself staring into a gun. The burglar ordered him to hand over all the household valuables, then started to leave. The husband stopped him. He said,

"Before you go...I'd like you to come upstairs and meet my wife. She's been expecting you every night for over 30 years."

"You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear" writes St. Paul. How do you not fear? That is the question for this morning.

Comedian Jerry Lewis said he once talked to his doctor about some of his problems and when he finished the doctor suggested, "Jerry...don't worry". "Doc" replied Jerry, "How do you 'don't worry'?"

That's a good question. How do you don't worry? How do you not dread? And how do you not be afraid?

WE BEGIN BY DISCOVERING WHERE FEAR RESIDES

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The word fear comes from the Old English, "faer" - meaning sudden danger. It refers to fright where fright is justified. It refers to danger that is concrete, real, knowable. In such cases fear is appropriate, and sometimes useful, if one is to escape harm. Such fear is the least of our problems, however.

We are more apt to be haunted by anxiety, worry and dread. Anxiety comes from the Latin, anxious, meaning a tight feeling in the chest. It is fear that stays with us even when there is no real, concrete, knowable stimulus. It is the fear of the uncertain, the possible, the "what if" factor. Anxiety comes not from without but from within.

As usual, Paul put his finger right on it. Fear, when it manifests itself as anxiety, worry, dread, is a spirit. It is something we carry around with us on the inside. We have it long before we encounter anything actually worth fearing. It is a condition of the mind, the heart, the soul. Thus, the only cure is a bit of a reorientation within. That is why Paul writes,

"You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the spirit of sonship".

But let's move on, taking this a step further and consider a cure for anxiety and worry.

A NEW SENSE OF IDENTITY

The only cure for anxiety, for worry and for dread is a new sense of identity...a sense of

knowing who we are.

The psychologist Erickson contends that the most basic need of an infant is the development of a sense of trust. And that is the most basic need of every adult as well. Those of us stricken by the spirit of fear and worry and dread need a faith-lift. We need to know that we can lean back on those "everlasting arms", We need to know that a Divine Friend is there in the picture for each of us. Fulton J. Sheen many years ago said something that has remained with me. He said,

"Anxiety increases in direct ratio and proportion as a person departs from God"

I believe he's right on target. The cure for our fear is a sense of our sonship or daughtership.

But what does this mean in practical terms? What are some practical steps each of us can take to conquer the spirit of fear?

FOCUS ON TODAY

First-off, focus on today - not tomorrow or yesterday.

Some of us are crippled by the mistakes of the past. We lie awake at night reliving past humiliations, anticipating the consequences of past misdeeds, regretting the tragedy of missed opportunities. No teaching is more clear in Scripture than this one. The past is gone.

"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

And Paul advises us in Philippians 3:13 to "forget those things that are past". And what great advice that is!

Of course one way of preventing future worries is to seek to be persons of character today. We can't do anything about yesterday, but we can do something about today. Guilt plays a large role in many people's anxiety. Forget those things that are past. Let go of them.

We are also to forget those things that are yet to come. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount,

"Do not be anxious about tomorrow...each day has trouble enough of its own".

Concentrate on today. Who knows what tomorrow may bring. Today is the only day we can be certain of.

Norman Vincent Peale has a marvelous illustration of this. He says that when he and his wife would drive up to their Summer home they would often arrive at night. A rough path of stepping-stones led from the parking area to the house. On stepping out of the car with a flashlight, he discovered that it would not illuminate the entire path, just the stones directly in front of him.

However, by stepping from one stone to another, he could reach the house quite easily.

That is how life is best-lived...focusing on one day, one step, one task at a time. So many of us are missing the joy of living because mentally we are somewhere off in the past or thinking too much about the future. Focus on today - not tomorrow or yesterday.

FOCUS ON THE THINGS YOU CAN CONTROL

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Secondly, try to focus on the things you can control rather than those you

After a pastor had preached a sermon on the Ten Commandments, a member of the church said, "I want you to preach a sermon sometime on the eleventh commandment." "What is that?" asked the pastor. She explained,

"The eleventh commandment is 'Don't sweat the little things'".

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As Bonnell got out some time later, the driver said simply,

"Mister, I've learned something today that I'm going to try not to forget."

There are legitimate needs and responsibilities each of us has. We need to concentrate on them. It is difficult to do constructive work and destructive worry at the same time. Still, there are some things beyond our control. At such times we need to relax and say, "I've done all I can do. This is beyond my control". At this point you arrive at a point of decision. Is there Someone who holds your life and mine in the palm of His hand or not? If so, can He be trusted? This brings us to the third and final step that I would like to lift up.

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"As the marsh-hen secretly builds on the watery sod,
Behold, I will build me a nest on the greatness of
God."

Said Paul, "You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship". Remember, we are children of the King! Certainly, there are legitimate things in this world to fear, but He is greater than them all!

What are you afraid of? Forget about tomorrow and yesterday. And focus on today. Enjoy it to the fullest. Focus on those things you can control, not those you can't. Do the best and entrust the rest to God. Focus on your faith and not your fears. Think on God's goodness and His power rather than on the frailties of your own flesh. Do not be enslaved to your fears any longer. Let Him help you break those chains with a new spirit of trust, of hope, of joy, of love. Rejoice in your identity - as sons and daughters of God.

Earlier this week I was invited to offer the invocation at a commencement exercise where Sigourney Weaver was the guest speaker. She closed her marvellous speech with these lines that tie in with what we've been thinking about here this morning:

"Come to the edge", I said. "No. We're afraid."
"Come to the edge" "No...we're afraid. We'll fall."
"Come to the edge" I said again. And they came. And I
pushed them.
And they flew!

PRAYER

Give us the wings of faith to fly...even in the midst of our fear and uncertainty...for as sons and daughters of the King, we know our lives are secure and in Your keeping. Help us to remember this and to build on "the greatness of God"...even when we come to "the edge". In the spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen.

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PRAYER

LAY READER: Sam Wilson

DATE: June 10, 1990

BEFORE

"The Scripture Reading for today is taken from the

GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN, Chapter 14, verses 1-14

It is found on page 939 in the BIBLE that is in the p

(Allow about 10 seconds for people to
locate the reading before you start reading..
Thanks.)

AFTER

"Thus endeth the reading taken from the Holy Scri
May God add His Blessing to the reading of His Word and to
understanding of it. Thanks be to God! Amen!"

INSTRUCTIONS

1. The minister will give you a nod when to come forward. He will make sure the Bible is open to the proper page for you.
2. After announcing the passage to be read, PAUSE...for about 15 seconds to give people the opportunity to locate the reading in the Bible in the pews.
3. Read slowly. Don't rush it. Keep your voice "up" and smile a bit if you can remember to. Be sure to project your voice out...the person on the last row has to be able to hear you.
4. Careful walking up....careful walking back down. slowly.

PASTORAL PRAYER: June 17, 1990

LORD, You know the many concerns that press down upon us.

We can't leave them at home...
We believe that You want us to bring them here in
prayer...and to talk them over with You.
We remember that "more things are wrought by prayer than
this world has ever dreamed of...."

WE find ourselves fussing and fretting about far too many things.

We worry about our work and our advancement in the firm.
We worry about our children and their grades, their
behavior in School.
We worry about our health...that ache, that pain.
We worry...and in so doing we become tense and tight.

For some here today, the problems seem so big that nothing
else can find room in the mind but that problem.

LORD, whatever our problem:

We ask in these moments of prayer for Your guidance in
dealing with it.
Help us in our worship to draw far enough back from what
is now troubling us, until we see it in new perspective.

HELP US to rethink and re-examine our priorities.

Lord, we make mountains out of molehills and molehills out
of mountains.
We let things that should occupy our attention slip by
unnoticed, and let little things blind us to
everything else.

LONG AGO You asked people to put first the goal of Your Kingdom and said
that everything else would easily fall into place.

Sometimes we find this difficult to believe and to do.
And we have a hard time living it. We believe it, Lord;
Help our unbelief.

THROUGH this service worship, help each of us:

To put first things, first. Last things, last!
Until we spend our moments and our days in doing those things
that really matter the most in life.

SURROUND us with Your spirit. SURPRISE us with Your joy. STRENGTHEN us in
Your word. SEND US out of here with Your love. All this so that
we can become more human, more honest, more hopeful. In the
name and spirit of Christ, our Lord, we pray.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, June 17th, 1990

I. GREETING / VISITORS

- A. We welcome the visitors in the congregation this morning and invite you to make yourselves known to us....fill out a visit card and sign one of the Guest Books. Be free in the sharing of your name...and join us for the coffee hour downstairs following the service. Worship with us on other Sundays. Work with us, too...in the outreach programs...
- B. The roots of this church are deep in the soil...doing the Lord's work here since 1837. Fourth building. We minister in the name of Christ and it is in His loving spirit that we greet you.
- C. Members: wear your name tags at the coffee hour. Make two new friends. Take a moment to bid farewell to Jeff and Karen Goss who are moving to Atlanta this week..after four years here in the city. Wish you well. Also George and Dorothy Redington who leave the city within the next two weeks and are moving to New Jersey. We minister to a "parade" of people..many wonderful people..coming and going.

II. PARISH CONCERNS

- A. Parish concerns in the bulletin . Review them on your own noting the study and spiritual growth opprtunities (Hounds, Aldersgate Class, and Adult Bible Class)...also the fellowship events:
 - 1. Methodist Night at Shea stadium this Tuesday. Be in touch with Janet Ernst regarding your ticket and travel time.
 - 2. Church Picnic of Saturday...make sure you have your ticket from Doreen Morales and be on time! Bus leaves at 8:30 am!
- B. This evening...a special "Ecumenical" service...6 pm at St. James'...71st and Madison Avenue....worthy of our support - presence and participation. I hope some of you will attend with me...meet here at 5:30 pm...provides us with an opportunity to make an ecumenical witness. Tnight. 6 pm. St. James'. Bulletin insert describes it to you.

III. OFFERING

- A. Envelope...Peace and Justic appeal of our Conference. Support it. "More blessed to give than to receive". In this spirit...

"And all things...whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing...you shall receive. And as many as touched Him were made whole!"

"Wait on the Lord. Be of good course and He shall strengthen thine heart. For we dwell in the shelter of the Almighty. He is our refuge and our strength."

"We know that in everything, God works together for good with those who love Him!"

"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint".

"God so love the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life".

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases".

"Thou wilt keep Him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in thee".

"In the name of Jesus Christ, I share with you the Good News: We are forgiven".

PRAYERS / LORD'S PRAYER

O Thou, who hearest prayer, hear our prayers...for others, as well as for ourselves. Touch with healing, O God...Father of us all, those whom we mention in our prayers this hour:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. <u>Jane Brown, mother of</u> | 2. <u>Daisy Herrick</u> | 3. <u>Marion Busk</u> |
| Edward | | |
| 4. <u>Ada Kinney</u> | 5. <u>Hilda Thomas</u> | 6. <u>Gertie Keen, aunt of Dewey</u> |
| | | Wood |

...beloved members and friends of this congregation. Comfort the bereaved and the broken hearted among us...and especially be close to _____ who in recent days has lost a loved one. Abide among us as a healing benediction. Heal each of us at the point of our deepest need.

Answer the upspoken prayers now offered to thee on the altars of our hearts, spoken in the name and spirit of Jesus, who taught us to say when we pray.... For we ask all of this in the powerful name and lifting spirit of Jesus who taught us to say when we pray...

"Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power and the glory, forever. Amen"

FIRST INTRODUCTION

The week of toil has ended. Our day of rest is at hand. May the rest and the quiet of this hour of worship refresh our inner life. And may it renew in all of us a sense of God's holy and abiding Presence.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

SECOND INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter now into a time of silent meditation....a time in which we prepare ourselves expectantly...that the Spirit of the living God may be made real to us in this hour of worship.

In quietness, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

THIRD INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter into a time of silent meditation as we come into the Presence of Him whom our faith declares to be the Source of all life and love, all peace and power, the Source of all hope and healing.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

FOURTH INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter now into a time of silent meditation. In these moments, let us ponder the pattern our lives have been weaving as we come into the Presence of Him whom our Faith declares to be the Source of all life and love, all peace and power, the Source of all hope and healing.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

MEDITATION

We rest our hearts in the Promise of Jesus who said:

"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light".

"Ask, and it will be given you. Seek and you will find. Knock, and it will be open unto you."

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father, but by Me. If you love Me, you will keep my commandments"

"For I tell you...do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat...or drink..nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food? And the body more than raiment."

"But seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present...to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature - shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, Our Lord."

We pray, too, for our city...beset at times and in places with racial strife and animosity...restless, fractious and tense.

We pray for HEALING among your many children...that understanding and brotherhood may prevail...and help each of us in our daily walks and tasks to maintain the vision of the "gorgeous mosaic" of which our elected leader...feels so deeply and speaks so movingly.

We pray, for our President...as he prepares this weekend for the summit conference..and its success in bringing the nations closer together.

PARK AVENUE METHODIST CHURCH

106 East 86th Street
New York, N.Y. 10028

Name _____ Telephone _____

Address _____

“IF OUR WALLS COULD SPEAK...”

I would like to give or pledge the following amount to the
Restoration Fund of the Park Avenue United Methodist Church:

\$ _____ to be paid Annually Quarterly Monthly Signature _____ Check enclosed

RESTORATION FUND

1989-1990

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THE SUMMIT CONFERENCE...AND ITS SUCCESS IN BRINGING THE NATIONS

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