

SERMON: FAITH & DOUBT: “*Two Sides of a Coin*”

Rev. Geoff Ross Sunday, March 7, 2021 St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church.

[Before we begin, let me ask you this: How many times have you found yourself in the garden, naked, and afraid; and you hid yourself? Metaphorically speaking, of course – but, if you have, maybe we should talk.... I ask because this is the archetypal pattern for the #1 reason why we wrestle with doubts/are estranged from God.]

John Ortberg, in his book ***If You Want to Walk on Water, You’ve Got to Get Out of the Boat***, tells us that the single command/instruction, that occurs more often than any other, are to simple words: “*fear not*” – or as it’s also know; “*Do not be afraid*”/“*be courageous*”/“*Trust to Lord.*” And this is interesting: fear isn’t on the list of Seven Deadly Sins/fear – but, yet, God repeats this command/instruction more than anything else. He then concludes that he thinks “*God says ‘fear not’ so often because fear is the number one reason human beings are tempted to avoid doing what God asks them to do.*” And this – friends – is the truth! Fear/worry whisper to our doubts/us that God is not big/strong enough to take care of us – or that God would want to/loves at all. Fear triggers our fight/flight response; it’s a toxin that poisons our trust/corrodes relationships – it impairs/withers our hopes/dreams stunting our God-created/called/commissioned potential/work in/through us. Fear gives oxygen to the lie that God cannot be trusted/our faith in God is misplaced.

[Do not be afraid/364 times in the NRSVBible/465NIV/16KJV!:not 100% true. Not all about relationship with God – but speaks to our need to put of trust/faith in God. Often/Direct translation=140 times.Other similar words/terms/phrases= 364times. Add ‘fear the Lord’ over 700 times! Both are important/essential for our faith... Let’s get back to the Garden!]

If you’ve had children, you’d know what’s happening here: Adam and Eve were told the rules/knew the boundaries/what was off limits – and, of course, like magnets, they were drawn to it – tricked into giving in to their curiosity/temptation. Having trespassed/transgressed/disobeyed they knew they were in trouble – it was as obvious as their being naked! – and they experience fear/became afraid of the result of their breaking God’s trust – because it’s a two-way covenant. Not knowing what to do, they did what shame causes us to do – they hid; first from each other/fig leave, then from God/bushes-lies. But, like children, their efforts to hid are puerilely obvious, but God – knowing where they are – calls out to them; “*Where are you?*” And, we’re still hiding/He’s been calling us – ever since.

Last week we heard about “Trust”; today, as Simpson said: we’re looking at the issue of fear. At the core of our doubts is fear – our fear that God doesn’t exist, or love us/you/me – or has our best interests at heart/or God’s promises are true/real. Our fears fuel our doubts/undermines our faith/erodes out trust in God. To deal with fear:confront it!/shine light on it – declaw/defang it...Choose to not live/die by it! - the cost of hiding/sin is death. This “fear” – being afraid/fearful/hiding of/from God – while understandable (again, after all, He’s God and we’re not!), the Bible/God tells us is an

unhealthy/unhelpful/self-perpetuating response that deepens/widens the gulf between us/God and compounds the harm of that first/original sin. To ‘fear the Lord’ – to love/trust/have faith in God – is the only/right/essential way to honestly/obediently – without hiding/shame/fear:it is the beginning of the repentance needed to repair/right our relationship.

[It's HN/DNA:We all fear the same thing – losing. What scares most/keeps you awake/causes worry? Right now, COVID?Your health/loved one's/school/work/money/job – death? Just missing out?We all fear losing something that we value.So, what are you afraid of/hiding?]

Fear/doubt, more than anything else, keeps us from trusting/having faith in God. Yet God in/through Jesus came to us to embody the hope of salvation. In our John reading/as a reminder/promise Jesus/Himself offers us these words of hope: *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe/trust in God, believe/trust also in me.*”/“*I will not leave you orphaned*”/“*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*” The truth is we live in a world where fear/doubt is so epidemic that we all carry more than we can bear/we are burdened/weighed down by the fear/immobilized-encumbered/yoked by our doubts that we don’t know what to believe: but God in/through Jesus tells us; “*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*”(Matt 11:28) And the Table is where we can do this/it’s where we’re invited to come out of hiding/free from shame/fear to meet God/Jesus and lay down our regrets/receive the hope of God’s love/grace. Amen.