

Sermon Psalm 103:1-13 Luke 13:1-9 March 11, 2007

## The Amazing Grace of God - Overcoming Our Fears

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved... A strange line in an amazing hymn.... Grace that taught my heart to fear... Grace relieved my fears .... How precious did that grace appear... Which grace? The grace that made me fear... or the grace that took my fear away?

Do you remember the little song diddy from - it was from an old Musical .... It always disturbed me.... I am still not sure its true.... It went... You've got to taught, carefully taught, to hate....

The song says we learn to hate.... Maybe.... Though hating seems easier to teach than love.... Judging from the news of our day.. But I wonder - do we need to be taught to fear? 'Twas grace that taught my heart to Fear - Seems to me we learn to fear pretty much on our own.. Not sure it takes much to teach us to fear snakes.... Most people anyway... And I'm not sure how many volunteers we could get from this crowd to clean out the spiders in the basement.

Babies - I'm told - naturally fear loud noises, and being dropped.... Duh. And me, too. And though I'm better than my last dog - I'm not real fond of thunder and lightening - though I do stay out of the bathtub.....

Fears - we've all got them.... One writer of psychology says that the ultimate final and most basic fear is the fear of losing... of losing wealth, or health, or a loved one, and... your self. Your power, your position, your life....

Maybe... Maybe ... that's what the writer John Newman was telling us in the hymn... Maybe grace, by God's grace, we see our most basic fears.... From which all other fears grow....the fear of loss.... And... by God's gift of grace in Christ ... we see, we find, that we have been found... and so - we can learn to face our fears... all of them...

What do you fear - really fear in life.... ? For your health...some test to be taken...some result to be heard? For your job? Whether the other shoe will drop at Chrysler or Ford or all the places wrecked by the ripples. For your marriage your family..... how are your fears relieved?

Let us pray... Lord .. it doesn't seem to take much to teach us to fear.... But not to fear - for that Lord - help us to hear your word - and hear and see again - the saving fear defeating power of your great love for us in Christ. Amen.

It was a childhood prayer - it got to the heart of the issue. Though these days I hear its discouraged - too frightening for kids. Did you pray it? Do you?

Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the lord my soul to take. Okay - yes - a little heavy. But - show me where it says life isn't heavy. I mean - please - don't expose little kids to such fears in a prayer - you harsh Christians....

But then - video games of unspeakable mayhem, and news reports of grim violence, and newspaper headlines of murdered spouses played out for days, and sports that teach fear with no grounding in something greater than any fear....

NO - I think I like the prayer to help prepare kids for a world - full of things to be feared - and - faced - in faith. The psalmist did it - did you hear... ? Bless the Lord O my soul, who forgives iniquity, heals diseases, redeems from Death, grants mercy in trouble, vindicates us when wronged... The psalmist names what we ought to fear, and do.... And promises something greater than our fears....

What do we fear - what do you fear ... ? Isn't loss.. Isn't it? Loss of self esteem, of self worth, of ... self. The Job, the wife or husband, the health, the wealth, ...life... from spider, bat, lightning, earthquake, wind or fire - Ford, Chrysler, GM - or the grim reaper...

Loss... There is an old story - about from Bible lands - about a stream in the Dessert - Seems the stream wanted desperately to cross the dessert to be joined to a world of water on the other side. Time and again the stream would thrust its wet waters into the dry sand - and soon be soaked in.

And then a wise creature said to the stream... Let the winds of God carry you where you want to go.... And the stream could find no sense in the words.... At first. And then it sunk in.... Let himself go...go with the winds of God.... Give himself up - to the ways of God.... And he would be lifted up and dropped as cool rain on the other side of the dessert...

Twass Grace that taught my heart to fear ..... You can let your water fun into the dry sands of life = chasing down all your fears.... Or.... Or... you can let God work God's way in your life.... And grace my fears relieved....

If... if... we only knew - which fears to fight with all our might, and which fears to leave to God? And... we kind of do..... if we want to. We just need maybe do a bit of replay - slo mo action in our lives - and we can see how do it all better going forward...

If we'd face our failures and weaknesses a bit more face up - straight in the eye, May be we'd handle them better..

It fascinates me to watch the NCAA basketball games - and this weeks run up to the selections. Talk about looking things in the face -

I must have watched the replay of Miami of Ohio's last second win - that's one of my wife's school's by the way - but the replay of the missed free throw and last second basket played over and over again. And - there was some learning there - that's why teams watch films...

And we.... I'm guessing most of us ... spend about 30 seconds a week here - thinking at all about mistakes we might have made, things we might have done wrong, fears we have without any real reason to have the fears we have - if - if - our faith is true. We could do with a little instant replay. See how we might let our faith play more for us.

We just don't let grace - God's word and promise to us - teach us what we ought to fear... and then, then, we don't let that grace show us, teach us, help us see - that in Christ, and with Christ and through Christ - we have nothing to fear at all...

The next verse of the hymn says it - we'll sing it next week.... Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relived, Though many dangers, toils and snares I have already come, tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will see me home..  
Grace = yes... Fear = know.

In the strange scripture reading from Luke - Jesus picks up the theme. The theme of getting straight about life, about its happenings, about fear and about faith. Fear - Pilate killed innocent Galileans - mixed their blood with the religious sacrifice of the people - defiled their faith and rubbed their noses in it.... Violence - to be feared - it is a bit of our undoing in Iraq - people hated Hussein - but better the devil you know - than the whirling dervishes the War there has now unleashed with all its random terror.

A tower fell - people killed. Fear points a finger at the victims. The baseball boys to Bluffton - must have not been good people. New Orleans - well - God's price for a loose life style. AIDS - you earned it. And the word is ..... Be afraid!! Be afraid!! God gets you!

But the answer is.... No!... NO! No! No!.....

Yes - life gets you.... Life gets us all....Murderous villians - senseless purposely misguided religious fanatics - drunk drivers, and lonely teens with guns - enraged fired workers - and angry spouses, and downsizing, and illness, and age and age and age....God gets you! You better watch out, your better not cry, you better not pout, for God is coming to town. The tower falls.... Be fear ful - of every foot fall you take....

And Jesus - Jesus says - no.... no. And yes... he says something else. Something Disturbing - something true.... But something that can overcome our fears....

NO - the tower did not fall on bad people because they were bad.... Jobs are not lost because the workers were bad, cancer - most often - is just a circumstance of life ...  
To be sure - and here its hard to hear Jesus - because here he spoke hard words....

To be sure – They may well die without hope, you may well suffer for the kind of life you lived - the tree in the storm may get you, the plane crash too, and people in most cases - your death will be the end of your story...

For they, you and I have not lived by faith, nor by trust In God, nor by obedience to his way - We may seem be the stream at the edge of the desert - and never cross over, because we never crossed into the life of faith, and trust, and belief

William Barclay - there great Scottish Biblical Scholar talks about suffering in our lives - and without answering - or even trying to answer all the questions of suffering - especially undeserved suffering - says this..

In talking to Jewish leaders Jesus was making these points...

1. WE do suffer the immediate consequences of our personal actions.. our sins. Smoke a lot - and you will increase your odds of illness.
2. But we also suffer though no fault of our own - earthquake wind and fire....
3. And - yes - a nation can bring down upon itself and Its people the consequences of a nation's sins, its arrogance and pride - maybe a word of warning for us...
4. And last - for both persons and nations - to repent, to turn to God and to God's ways is to find forgiveness, and healing and hope... hope in God's saving love.

That was the Psalmists word...Bless the Lord O my soul, who forgives all your iniquities, who satisfies you with good as long as you live. And it is no wonder - for the writer of the Psalm was David.... And David knew the highs and lows of faith - of trusting and of doubting God...

Max Lucado has written another insightful book, about facing our fears in life... Using David as a model....Facing your Giants...He talks about how David - through faith - faced not only Goliath - but all the fears that face us down in life - The prayed for jobs that don't come, the people, bosses, neighbors, who make life miserable, the illnesses that cut is off at the knees, the deep losses, the broken hearts experiences, our own weaknesses and sinful actions,

He names them all.... And points out over and over and over again - David's answer in the face of every one of the fears he faced in his life - even death.

David gave it to God... over and over and over - David gave his fears to god... Not quickly, not readily, not even often with much faith... and sometimes very late in the game. But David always. Always gave it to God. Lived by faith...``In every situation - were David in our shoes - before he would step out to face a fear in his life -he would look up - in devotion and prayer.... He would draw upon strength beyond his own strength - he would grab for a new grip on God's Grace.... No matter how down - he would reach up...

And ... And - in the strange words of Luke - the wonder of God's grace is Given new meaning...

And - Jesus does one of his strange things - he blesses a barren fig tree... Well - he tells the story of the fig tree that isn't much good for anything - and - pleads the trees case - give it time... give it time.... See if it can see what God intends it to be....

And all this... all this about fear - about how we face the fears in our lives ... is deeply embedded in Jesus life.... In his understanding of his faith.... in the face of fear - you face up to it - face forward in the way of God... You sing with the psalmist - Bless the lord, O my soul, and let all that is within me, bless his holy name. You go for the grace....

It's not an easy way for us to walk - we've been running, racing, gunning our motorized way on a different self-centered roadway of life... We keep pushing our little streams into the desert of life .... And ... the end is as it can only be... Very dry....

Little things... we pay higher taxes and prices - because of the basic dishonesty in our culture - from corner crooks to congresspersons. We glorify sports figures whose lives are a scandal - and think our youth don't notice. We ache over the loss of family life and yet treat the 50% divorce rate and less than 50% marry for people living together as just an expression of personal freedom. We are the streams of our lives running.... dry

And on the other hand.... How enriched, blessed, grace filled are those who pour themselves out for no reward - you heard the mission trippers from Mexico - watch the video ...

Grace - Gods grace can teach us to fear - to be fearful of the all too deeply selfish ways we live - And grace - God's grace in Christ can call us to a very different, very giving, very sharing way of life that finally enriches us as no other way of life can.

Tw'as grace that taught my heart to fear - God's good word - fig tree - barren - bared to the axe ---- And grace my fears relieved - fig tree.... be a fig tree... David - child of God - live like a child of God.... God's word of Grace - a warning! And - God's word of Grace - a welcoming call to be all that God has made you and made me to be....

How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.... Believed that I am a beloved child of God.... And I have nothing to fear... For I am his and he is mine.... Forever. Amen.

David W. Robertson, Pastor

