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Proper 28B09 / November 15 / Hebrews 10:11-25, Mark 13:1-8

As I was contemplating the Scriptures this week, a question came to my mind that I want to share with you. And the question is simply this: "Do you think that a day can ever pass whereby a person won't be afraid of anything? Can a full 24 hours pass in a day without a person being afraid of something?"

The reason that I ask this question is because both our Gospel reading and Paul's letter to the Hebrews speak to us about the importance of our having confidence. They speak about not being afraid by signs of the end of the world and they speak about not being fearful when it comes our time to meet God. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus encourages his disciples not to be alarmed when the temple is destroyed, when nations are rising against nations, and when earthquakes and famines are overwhelming various parts of the world. And in like manner, Paul tells us that, because of Christ's sacrifice, you and I can enter the sanctuary of God with confidence ~ that is, we can meet the living God and live!

And yet ~ while these are good words and very *encouraging* words, they are not words that normally startle us into doing something. Nor do these words necessarily strike us with any real sense of urgency. Many people, I suspect, do not fear the end of the world (at least from the biblical perspective of Christ's coming again) on an everyday basis. I daresay even that not too many Christians wake up each morning wondering if Jesus is coming back today or not. I likewise suspect that there are those who do not fear meeting God on a daily basis ~ quite frankly because they haven't given the matter much *thought* ~ and they probably *won't* until the time comes when they will *need* to give it some thought or will be *inspired* to give the matter some

thought. Thus as a result, if we are not careful, our focus on these two lessons can become overly narrow ~ so narrow, in fact, that these two lessons won't seem to apply to our lives.

On the other hand, we also run the risk of our focus becoming far too wide. That is, some Christians may very well recognize that these two particular lessons are talking about having a strong confidence in Christ: a confidence which they have used to meet their fears ~ *all* their fears ~ each and every one of them. And because they have been immersed in the Christian faith for such a long time, and have tested and trusted in the claims of Jesus for many years, they know that although they may at times be afraid, their confidence in Jesus assures them that their fears will never overwhelm them. As a result, these two lessons may only serve as a reminder of the confidence that Jesus gives us ~ but still ~ they do necessarily call us into any action.

I would like, therefore, to propose a *third* way of looking at these two lessons. For those who are looking at them too narrowly, I would like to invite you to widen your focus. Because these words of Jesus and Paul are indeed speaking to all our fears in life, not just two. And their words are all about meeting these fears of ours with confidence, the kind of confidence that only our Savior, who conquered eternal death, can give us. As Paul wrote in Romans, "What shall we fear?" Nothing at all. And for those who are looking at these lessons too *broadly*, I would like to encourage you to *narrow* and to *sharpen* your focus ~ not in order to see these two lessons more *clearly* ~ but in order to see and discover your *neighbor* ~ in order to see and discover your *neighbor* who may be struggling with life-engulfing fears every day of their lives.

Some fears in life may have passed some of us by. We may have outgrown the monsters under our beds (maybe) or maybe we have become so familiar and so comfortable with the good news of God's love that fear (*real* fear, the type that threatens to completely undo us) rarely reaches out to grab us. But for *many* people, especially those who do not have the confidence

that faith in Christ provides, fear can be and is an all-pervasive presence in their lives. Fear shapes their behavior during the daytime ~ and it fashions the dreams that they dream at night. I'm not talking about the physical kind of fear that touches us when we see a car running through a red light that barely misses us ~ nor do I mean the kind of fear we experience when our doctor tells us that we (or a friend) might have cancer. I'm talking about the kind the fear that people experience when they think that life is pointless; the fear that seeks to convince us that no one will ever love us; the fear that assures us that every hand is set against us. I'm talking about the fear that whispers to us that God does not really exist ~ and if He does, we would certainly be the *last* ones that God would want to spend eternity with.

And thus ~ for the sake of those who experience these kinds of fears as a daily reality, it would behoove each of us to remember the confidence that *we* have been given in Jesus Christ. For that confidence, like our faith, comes to us as a *gift!* And like any gift from Jesus, it is a gift that is meant to be shared.

When we were children, for example, our parents gave us the confidence that there were no such things as monsters under our beds. Even though some of us had sisters who stood behind our parents whispering, "Yes, there are!" ~ we *knew* whom to believe. And that was a gift. And it was a gift that, in time, we shared with our *own* children. Indeed, I suspect that many of the fears that you and I have faced in life were not fears that we conquered on our volition. We conquered them because Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit working through others, gave us the *confidence* that we needed in order to conquer those fears ~ and not let them overwhelm us.

What, then, are these lessons calling upon you and I to do? In essence, you and I are being asked to share our confidence in Christ ~ to share that precious, precious part of our own

faith ~ with those for whom fear may very well be a daily reality. And how do we do this? By asking our neighbor who knows not Christ how they are doing. We do this by sharing our love of God's world and of God's people with the lonely person who is sitting in a nursing home ~ a person who, despite their relatively good health, keeps saying that there is nothing to live for. We do this by telling our workaholic friends, friends who work seventy hours a week because they fear not getting ahead ~ we can tell them of the peace and the joy that comes from working less and playing with and loving our families more. We can tell those who believe themselves to be unlovable and unforgivable that God does indeed love them ~ and that Jesus has indeed forgiven them. We can reveal to our neighbors the light that has placed in our lives by Jesus to those whose whole world has been engulfed by the darkness of their fear and their inadequacy.

When we *listen* to the fears of our neighbors ~ when we listen to the fears of our friends and our loved ones ~ and when we choose to share the confidence that we know ~ we are living out Christ's vision of a new heaven and a new earth. We are helping Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, build a kingdom of justice and truth; a kingdom of joy and love; and a kingdom of peace and plentitude.

Remember, therefore, Jesus' gift of confidence when you are afraid ~ remember to share that confidence with others when *they* are afraid ~ and let us all approach life with a true heart in the full assurance of our faith, holding fast to the confession of our hope without wavering. For he who has promised confidence is faithful. Amen.