

Startled and Terrified  
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Luke 24

Once again we have an appearance of Jesus to the disciples in Jerusalem. Again this was in the room where they were hiding. This is set immediately after the two disciples, Cleopas and probably his wife have returned to Jerusalem after meeting Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Here is the passage that precedes it.

“Luke 24: 33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

So it is evening of the first Sunday just as it was in John. Jesus greets them with the words “peace be with you,” shalom the peace of God. They see Jesus and they are startled and then in one of Luke’s favorite words, “terrified.” As I have worked with Luke I noticed the word terrified shows up quite a few times and almost always having something to do with Jesus. The word appears three times during the birth narrative, once at the transfiguration and then again at this appearance.

Yet Jesus responds with the question “Why are you frightened and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” Then echoing John’s words last week he shows them his hands and his feet and encourages them to touch him to see that he is substantial, not a ghost. Yet even with this they rejoice but were still disbelieving and wondering. How do you relate to that? Has there been something in your life experience where the proof is in front of you and yet you have trouble believing it? Think of what that felt like and put yourself in the role of the disciple.

This is a great passage to do a meditation on. Place yourself in the room and experience it. This is a very powerful meditation and I encourage you to try it this week.

I found the recurring theme of fear quite powerful in our world today. We live in a fearful world and there are many things that may keep us behind locked doors. Just look at what we need to do at the church today. During the week just one door open and if I’m not in the office even that door is locked. This is not a misplaced fear but how does this climate of fear hinder your life? How does this make our life more difficult as a parish is another important question?

Fear comes from a variety of sources. Physical fear, fear of rejection, fear of not having enough, fear of war, disease, prejudice, isolation, the list can go on and on. Spend enough time on this list and you may find yourself getting really depressed to be honest.

Yet into this world steps Jesus with his “why are you frightened and why do doubts arise in your hearts?”

I have been struck over the last several weeks as I have read the book *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear* and about how often fear is mentioned in the bible. Almost always there are references to being bound by fear. This is especially true of the Psalms. This past Thursday the psalm appointed for Morning Prayer was Psalm 18. Now I read a special translation of the psalms by Nan Merrill entitled *Psalms for Praying, an invitation to wholeness*. If you are not familiar with this book I highly recommend it.

All that said as background there were a couple of verses in Psalm 18 that really spoke to fear.

Oh Compassionate One, You reached  
From on high, You took me,  
You drew me out of many waters.  
You delivered me from the fears  
That bound me, and  
From ignorance that blinded me;  
For they threatened to overcome me,  
To separate me from You.

They came upon me when I looked not to You:  
Yet You, O Merciful One, were ever present  
You brought me forth into the Light;  
You released my fears, You delighted  
in me,

This is language that speaks of the great danger that fear drives us inward and away from help, away from God and the ability to allow god to help us. Fear can, if we allow it to, drive a wedge between us and God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. This leads us into what some refer to as the dark night of the soul; that deep sense of being separated from God. Then the fear can intensify and drive us even deeper into its grasp. This is what we are seeing in the disciples in these resurrection appearances. Fear has so overcome them that they seem to have given up and even when confronted with visual evidence of the presence of Jesus in his resurrected form, “even in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering.”

The kingdom, God’s kingdom, the world that Jesus invites us into is the answer to fear. So before the disciples can go out and proclaim the risen Lord, they must overcome their own fears. This does not mean that the fears are not there and in fact the disciples had legitimate fears of Rome as they went out to share the Gospel. The difference is that they were no longer paralyzed by their fears. That is the message here.

We all have things we fear and many that are legitimate, but we cannot allow fear to paralyze us into inaction or allow it to drive us inward to cower behind locked doors hoping the world will not touch us.

So what is the antidote to fear? You see in both the Gospel of John and in today's passage in Luke what are the first words of Jesus to the disciples in the room? Peace! In Hebrew it would be shalom. Completeness, soundness, welfare, wholeness, it is far more than just lack of conflict. This is about a relationship. In fact it is about being in a right relationship first with God, then with another, and with the world.

Our call is to try as best we can to bring that peace, that shalom into our world. We cannot fix it all, but we can help that one person, that one situation where we can be the hands and feet of Jesus.

One message in the book on fear and a message that I heard from our Presiding Bishop in his Easter message is the God has the final word and that word is one of Shalom, of wholeness, peace and healing. Fear never has the final word in the Kingdom of God and it is important to realize that. Sometimes when we are wrapped in a world of fear we pull back and do not see all the good that is going on, the good that God and people who are part of the Jesus movement are part of. You can be part of that good news and I want to suggest two ways to do that.

First of all get involved in some of our outreach. After the 10:30 service today we will make sandwiches which will go to downtown Norfolk to the Catholic Workers program and be handed out to homeless later this week. Then next Saturday we will go down to Norfolk and feed the people that gather there every Saturday. We will hand out sandwiches that somebody else made along with hot oatmeal, grits, fresh fruit and hot coffee that we will make that morning. We will hand that food to people who have very little and we will be greeted with smiles and thankyou's. We will give them socks and other things they need. It seems so little yet it helps so much. We grant them acknowledgement as we greet them, feed them and help them that they too are God's precious children, created in the image and likeness of God.

The second way to fight the fear and that is a type of personal devotion that I have mentioned before. This is to do the Examin<sup>1</sup> at the end of the day that is used by Jesuits. This is more than saying your prayers before going to bed. This is a chance to look back over the day and review it with God in mind. Take five minutes or so and have a little conversation with God or Jesus.

1. Become aware of God's presence. Look at where God has been in your day
2. Review the day with gratitude. Thank God for those moments when you have been aware of God's presence in your day
3. Pay attention to your emotions. Look for joy but also be aware of when fear has crept in, because it will. Don't judge, just notice
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow. What does God want from you in the new day.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen>

This takes practice but I have found it very helpful for many people. Above all else remember that God, that Jesus has the final word in our world. Fear cannot stand up to the power of God. Call on that power of the kingdom that Jesus proclaimed and vanquish your fears and enter into the kingdom of shalom.