

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"What Fears Are Holding You Back?"
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Restorative Justice Week

I'm not a big fan of horror or suspense movies. I'm told that the difference between the two genres is that one movie, the suspense, takes you up to the corner of the building and leaves to your imagination what is happening around the corner. The horror movie, on the other, goes around the corner and gets into graphic detail about what is going on there, way too much graphic detail, in my opinion. Those who I have known over the years tell me that there is a rush or exhilaration in going to either of these types of movies. I simply see them as paying someone to scare you. I think I have enough fears and anxieties without paying someone to scare me. It's like having a tattoo or a piercing. I have enough pain in my life. I just can't see paying someone to inflict more pain.

But that's just me. What about you? Are there fears in your life that come up again and again? I've noticed for me, that the airline seats are getting smaller and so are the aisles. Ah, you say, I know the reason for that. You are putting on weight! And you would be correct. But I still am feeling a bit more claustrophobic, particularly on those flights over five hours. I've experienced lots of fears. How about you? Fear of the dark...Fear of going over bridges...fear of being incompetent...fear of being made fun of...fear of the unknown...fear of certain bugs...fear of rejection...fear of constantly disappointing others...fear of being alone...the list can go on. Have you ever made a list for you?

It is often our fears and anxieties that control our lives and life decisions without us knowing it. The more traumatic life experiences we have, the more likely we have some fears and anxieties that deeply shape us. The thing is, sometimes it takes most of our lives before we even know or can remember the trauma. Abuse victims know this. Many war veterans know this. Victims of crime also go through periods of having to face their fears, to name just a few trauma groups.

Relational trauma also can develop various fears and anxieties in our lives as well. If a girlfriend or boyfriend, partner or spouse leaves you, this too can have a grave affect on your life attitudes, stirring up old anxieties and fears.

Now don't get me wrong, fears and anxieties are normal for most people. Most of us may not be profoundly guided by them. But many of us are. Most of us don't need medication to control our fears and anxieties, but some of us do. The key is to know who we are, to be aware of what's going on inside. Most of us have that work to do for the rest of our lives. It can be a difficult work. It should be pursued with our closest friends and family. The knowledge of our fears in the hands of someone who would use them against us would be another whole level of anxiety and fear. Therefore it is often something with which we may choose to trust a professional counselor, psychologist or psychiatrist. Such a person has been trained to listen and to help. Sometimes our friends and family members are not that person. In any case, it takes courage to face those fears, whether alone, with a professional or with a friend.

The Bible is full of case studies of individuals who model courage, and those who model fear and anxiety. Often these are the same person. David, throughout the Psalms, sings of his trust in God and even the underlying courage needed to trust in the God who is worthy of our trust and praise. He also often speaks of his fear of being killed by Saul's armies and men, and by other wicked individuals. He is open with God with his emotions, as he or another song writer was today in Psalm 123, as he asks again and again for mercy. We too are encouraged by his example to ask for mercy—mercy to have courage to change in God's direction, to ask for peace within when we cannot change, and for the wisdom to know the difference between these two scenarios.

The Bible was written in a patriarchal, male chauvinistic time when women and children were considered property. One would think that a book written in that time and culture would completely degrade women at every instance and place them far below men. But in fact, many parts of the Bible show women as heroes and examples to all. Such an example is Deborah, who showed courage in a time of military occupation and tyranny. In fact, you find Deborah as far more courageous than the man Barak who led ten thousand men into battle. Later in the same chapter of Judges 4, you find Jael, another woman, who is the one who brings victory to Israel. None of the men in this story look very strong, whereas the women save the day. Now this may often be the case in history, but those who write the history may not give credit where credit is due. However, in the Bible, the women are portrayed as the strong, courageous individuals that they are. And this is not only true in Judges 4 but also in Proverbs 31, and not only in isolated

chapters but also in Ruth, in Esther, and don't forget the Gospels where not only Mary and Elizabeth are praised, but also the women who first see and believe the resurrection has taken place. And you can find many other examples if you have eyes and ears to find them.

The Bible alerts us to the fact that Jesus will come again at the end of the world. He will come when we least expect it. In Thessalonians, Paul teaches that it will happen like the experience of a thief robbing your home in the middle of the night or like labor pains coming onto a pregnant woman. He warns us against trying to distract ourselves with extended partying or over-indulging in alcoholic beverages. He will come and we need to be ready in our relationship with Him, knowing where we stand in relation to him and his calling on our lives.

So you see that the Bible has not only the history of many valiant individuals, it also contains the core teaching of Jesus, God made human, living among us. Jesus used a kind of story telling, that we call parables, to help us understand the spiritual life. Many of these stories, most of us have had heard too many times, perhaps to the point where we think we know all that they have to tell us. This certainly seems to be true of the parable of the talents. We hear that headline and we think, yeah, yeah, God want us to use our talents for God. And that is certainly true. God does want to use our talents, gifts and abilities for Him. But let's remember first that the talent of that age was a monetary unit. It was the equivalent of 6000 denarii, and the denarius in another parable is what the people working in a vineyard get for working a full day. So you figure a talent is about the value of twenty years of common labor. It is a huge amount of money and unlike the coins of Jesus' day, it was worth the equivalent of hundreds of thousands of dollars in today's terms. So when the wealthy businessman went away on business and entrusted his employees with five and two and one talent, this was a huge investment. It may have been most or all of what he had.

This is the same today, as the Lord entrusts us with the riches of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ, a full relationship with him, and the calling to be his representatives and agents for love and truth, mercy and justice here on the earth. We know the one with the five talents risks the five and doubles it. Similarly the one with the two talents risks the two talents and doubles them. But the story really is about the one with the one talent, isn't it? How do you feel about him? Wasn't he taking the safe route? Wasn't he trying to not disappoint his employer?

In fact, we find out that he doesn't trust his employer. He thinks all kinds of bad things about his employer, even though he had been entrusted with such a huge amount of money. Wasn't it his fears that held him back from trusting the Lord? In the end, his not risking the talent caused him to lose it and everything else. So we come full circle to our discussion of our fears and anxieties. What fears and anxieties are keeping you from doing the Lord's work?

It certainly is fear and anxiety that keeps us from finding many new creative attempts at restorative rather than punitive justice. We fear the offender, even though we know our own brokenness, somewhat. We fear those who break the law, even though we can probably point to places in our own lives where we have broken the law. How can we help those who have been caught to live a new life Jesus promised? How can we help each other live the new life Jesus promised? These questions continue to help us as we look at our involvement here at St. David's. These questions also need to help us look at the leadership and membership of the church. Now is the time to ask what it means to lead here and to follow here the Jesus who invites us to risk our talent.

Let us pray.