

SUNDAY DEVOTIONS
21 June 2020 – Pentecost 3

OPENING PRAYER

O God, in your great love for us, you have lifted us from the chaos of our world, our circumstances, and of our own making, and placed us into a new and life-giving relationship with you. Help us in this time of worship to offer true praise to you, and to yield ourselves to the movement of your Spirit in our lives, so that all that we are and all that we do may bring glory to you, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

SONG* [Jesus Lover of my Soul](#) CCLI 5280999

PSALM 86 (*Jeff's Version for today – tomorrow's may be different*)

Listen a while, LORD,

things are less than ordinary right now.

Keep me afloat so that I can continue to worship you;

save me so that I can serve you and trust in you.

Care for me with the care and generosity

that only you can give,

even though I cry out all day long.

Cheer up the very core of my being,

because that's where my worship first stirs.

I ask, not just because all of the above apply,

but because you love like no other,

faithfully and inexhaustibly.

Just listen a while, O LORD.

When I'm in it up to my neck I call out,

because I know you will answer me.

Lord God, you are a "one off" –

and your works and wonders are extreme.

Eventually, everyone will come to that conclusion,

and they will praise you,

for you alone are God.

Teach me how it is with you, LORD,

so that I can live that way,

faithfully, and in awe of your name.

Thank you, Lord God,

from the bottom of my heart;

in your faithful and inexhaustible love you have saved me,

and given me life in my darkest moment:

I will praise you for ever.

Right now, O God,

there are ruthless forces wanting me out of the way.

But you, Lord, have been caring and compassionate

from very the beginning you've had a slow fuse,

and been faithful, with an inexhaustible love.

Turn and pour out your tenderness on me,

give me your strength to serve you,

as you did my mother.

Let me see something of your love right now,

something to dismay those who would do me in,

that you, O LORD, would help and comfort even me.

PRAYER OF ADORATION

God of those empty of hope
and those who are cast out:
into the chaos of every life
you enter with the silence of love;
when we choke on bitter memories,
you hand us the cup of healing;
when we wander down lonely streets,
you bring us home to your heart.

Jesus Christ,
conqueror of sin's power:
into our deepest pain
where life has bottomed out,
you dare to enter;
when we cry out with fear,
you cradle our hearts;
when we face death,
you stride out of the grave,
pointing the way to the kingdom.

Spirit of the forsaken
and bearer of compassion:
you are the mist shimmering
over the valleys,
stirring the waters of creation;
you are the dew bathing
the flowers every morning,
anointing us with resurrection's grace.

God in Community, Holy in One,
hear us as we pray. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

In baptism, we are promised new life, God of grace, yet we continue to focus on those old ways which are so comfortable and seductive. We are so good at fooling others that we are convinced we can trick you as well. We have been called to walk with you, and run down those paths paved with foolishness and fears.

Forgive us, God of steadfast love. You have claimed our lives in baptism, so we might be set free from sin and be raised to new life. Just as you save us, so give us the strength to be willing to take up whatever task you give us, and the faith to be willing to lose our lives for others, so we might find life forever with you, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

God is good and forgiving,
loyal to all who cry out for mercy.
Through our union with Christ
we are now dead to sin,
and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
Be at peace.
Your sins are forgiven.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

SONG [10 0000 Reasons](#) CCLI 6016351

BIBLE READINGS

[Genesis 21:8-21](#)

[Romans 6:1b-11](#)

[Matthew 10:24-39](#)

SONG [At the Cross \[Love Ran Red\]](#) CCLI 7017786

SERMON [Overcoming fear](#) [sermon.mp3](#)

SONG [Oceans \(Where feet may fall\)](#) CCLI 6428767

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

O Lord, we are often overcome by the trials of this world, and sometimes we blame you for our misfortune. Help us to see our challenges as opportunities to praise you through our response. Let our reactions to adversity testify to your never-ending mercy and grace. (Jer. 20:7-13)

Almighty Redeemer, do not hide your face from your servants. Make haste to help those in deepest need. We pray especially for those who daily face persecution, prejudice, violence and hatred. Send into their daily lives someone who can tell them of the hope you offer to all creation. Make *us* instruments of your peace. (Ps. 69:8-11, 18-20)

Loving Saviour, you have come into our lives so that through you, we too might walk in newness of life. We pray for our leaders, our ministers and our volunteers, that they may always be blessed by the Word they proclaim through their actions and the stories they tell. Be with them and keep them in your grace. (Romans 6:1b-11)

Holy Comforter, look with mercy on those in pain. Hear the pleas of divided family members for wholeness. You know the challenges they face. As our teacher and our friend, your life was full of physical, emotional and spiritual pain. You took those experiences with you in your resurrection. You know what these people are going through. Be with these friends and loved ones.

Today, we pray especially for...

Remove the fears and darkness that threaten to overpower them and bring them your peace. (Mt 10:24-36)

Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SONG [This is Amazing Grace](#) CCLI 6333821

WORD OF MISSION AND BENEDICTION

Go now and walk in newness of life
for Christ was raised from the dead.

Therefore do not be afraid.

What God speaks to you in the dark, proclaim boldly in the light.

Take up your cross and follow the Christ.

And may God watch over you and provide for you;

May Christ Jesus openly declare you to be his own;

And may the Holy Spirit bring you help and comfort always.

Amen.

* Songs chosen by Fiona

OVERCOMING FEAR

Pentecost 3 Year A

Gen. 21:8-21; Ps. 86:1-10; Rom. 6:1b-11; Mt. 10:24-39

21/06/2020

The King's guard in Greece have a motto, which states: "All men have fears, but the brave put down their fears and go forward, sometimes to death, but always to victory."

What is it you fear the most? Some of you may have seen a program on TV called, *Fear Factor*, that was on some years ago. It's not the sort of thing I usually like to watch. In fact, there's not much I like to watch on the television at all, these days. However, I did see some snippets of the program as others in my family watched it from time to time when it was airing some years ago. *Fear Factor* is about offering contestants money or prizes to do things they fear the most—some of them absolutely disgusting—and then upping the financial ante until they agree to do it. A modern day version of this is something like, "I'm a celebrity, get me out of here." Another example of high-class viewing (ahem!).

For example, can you imagine eating wedding cake with alligator eyes and all kinds of live creepy crawlies in it, or being locked in a room full of tarantulas or snakes? Strangely enough, neither activity appeals to me. Yep, when it comes to that sort of thing, I'm a real wimp—and proud of it.

Fear comes in all sorts of guises. You might be afraid of doing gross things like you see on *Fear Factor* or *I'm a celebrity etc.* Or you might be afraid of something a little more serious, like losing your job or losing a loved one. You might be afraid of becoming seriously ill or if you are ill, being afraid of the cure.

There are a lot of other, perhaps more healthy, kinds of fear as well. As parents, we all want to put a little healthy fear into our children—and that's a good thing. We teach our children about the dangers of playing in the street, and the correct way to cross a street. We teach them not to play with matches or with sharp implements. All of that is good. It's a healthy kind of fear that we all want our children to have. The English poet and hymn writer, William Cowper, wrote, "He has no hope who never had a fear." A certain amount of fear heightens response and gets the adrenalin working.

These are all normal and healthy kinds of fear. Normal that is, until, for some strange reason, fear rises to such a point that it completely overshadows our rationality—and we become phobic and totally paralysed by the fear.

You've all seen the kind of movie where the Indiana Jones like hero and the slim, attractive and helpless young girl he's just saved from the clutches of the psychopathic megalomaniac who wants to take over the world, are attempting to escape. Here they are

(imagine the scene, if you will) climbing a rope up the side of a cliff with a large overhang, so they're just hanging in mid-air.

There is a strong wind blowing and the waves are crashing on the rocks 50 metres below. The hero has gone first to make sure the top of the cliff is clear—and having thus disposed of any hindrance in that area, he calls back the girl who is still climbing the rope—scared out of her brain. “You’re doing really well. You’re almost there. Just-don’t-look-down.”

Now, once he’s said that, you know exactly what the girl’s going to do next, don’t you. That’s right, she looks down and is suddenly paralysed by fear. She hadn’t even thought to look down until he told her not to—and now she’s even worse off than before. Now she can’t even move. She’s frozen to the rope. Somehow, the hero has to then climb back down the rope and help the girl up—probably carrying her on his back all the way to the top.

In our society today, we are taught to fear all kinds of things—some of them are healthy and rational—others are not quite so healthy or rational. And even as Christians, we can experience the debilitating effects of fear—fear that paralyses us into inaction.

Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626), the English philosopher, essayist and statesman, once said, “Nothing is to be feared but fear.” Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his Inaugural Address, delivered in 1933, built on Bacon’s quote when he said, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyses needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.”

As we look at today’s gospel reading from Matthew, we’re introduced to Jesus speaking to his disciples—immediately prior to sending them out to the towns and villagers—preparing them for what they might find—preparing them for the kinds of responses they might get to their message of the good news of the kingdom of heaven.

“There is no need to be afraid,” he is telling them. No need to be afraid when people kill you. No need to be afraid when they malign or insult you. No need to be afraid when they drag you off to the courts or to gaol. No need to be afraid when your family rejects you, when you lose your job, when you lose someone close to you because they think you’ve gone troppo.

I don’t know about you but I’d be afraid of all those things. It’s like I always tell my dentist, “I can handle anything but pain.”

The gospel identifies two particular fears that the apostles had—fear of being falsely accused and found guilty, and fear of bodily harm and death. In either case Jesus teaches

them that the way to overcome the fear is by keeping their mind focussed not on the circumstances here-and-now but on the coming kingdom of God.

In times of uncertainty, much like today with the threat of COVID-19, it's not surprising that many people show signs of fear and anxiety. Much of this fear and anxiety that people feel, especially during these tough times, is about their material security. Even when times are good, you never know if it's going to last. Will my business survive? Will I have enough money for my retirement? Will I be able to get that better paying job?

But that's not really what's happening here. Here, we're concerned with a rather different problem. Here we're concerned with what happens when Christians take seriously the way in which they live out the gospel. What happens when people speak out their faith in the face of threat and opposition?

In today's gospel reading, we're being reminded that to become a follower of Jesus Christ in the fullest sense (as opposed to just being a churchgoer)—that to spread his message of love, justice and peace in word and practice—will be seen by some people as a real threat to be resisted. Sometimes I think we live under the illusion that the perfect Christian is someone who is loved and admired by all. On the contrary, such a person is likely to be rejected and bitterly hated by many in society.

To be a fully committed Christian involves loving others with the same kind of love that Christ showed for us—a sacrificial love—a love that puts everything aside for the sake of another. But it's no guarantee that we will ever be loved in return. We are not Christians in order to be loved and have people look up to us—but to proclaim by word and example what it means to live in the kingdom of heaven. This is our priority against all other things. This is our priority of faith.

I heard recently of one priest who answered a telephone request for a baptism. His reply was rather unique. He said, "What! Do you know what you're asking? Do you realize that you're signing up your child for martyrdom?" (Maybe I should try that.)

Today's Gospel reminds us that as Christians we have a responsibility to stand up and be counted—to be prepared for some kind of martyrdom. Jesus said, "If anyone declares himself for me in the presence of others, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven. But the one who disowns me in the presence of others, I will disown in the presence of my Father in heaven." At the same time, we are assured of God's protection and help.

The greatest fear is not that we may be killed or beaten up or put in gaol or that our friends and family will reject us. The greatest fear is that we may be seduced into betraying those

values on which our Christian integrity depends. To save our “bodies” at the expense of truth, at the expense of love, at the expense of justice, at the expense of freedom—this is the real danger. That is the real death.

If we find that we are not known to be Christian, or that being a Christian seems to be no different from anyone else—if we find that our Christian communities, our congregations, leave no mark on their surrounding society—then we need to ask ourselves seriously what kind of Christian lives we are leading and what kind of witness to the Gospel we are giving. It’s not enough to be simply gathering together once a week for worship (when virus and regulations allow). Our lives—both individually and together as the body of Christ—need to witness visibly to truth of the gospel.

To do that—to be a living witness to Christ—may generate some hostility among people we know. Jesus says, “Do not fear those things.”

What we *should* fear, however, is God. Fear of God in the scriptures is a special term. In the proper context it refers to a profound respect for our Creator, a sense of reverence that we owe to God. That is a healthy fear. It doesn’t paralyse us, or make us afraid that God will harm us. On the contrary, it’s an awe and reverence that establishes a good, healthy relationship with our God. And it’s from that relationship that we learn that God is our strength and fortress in these times of fear.

When we recognize that we are not self-sufficient and that it is God who is the source of our strength, then we can have faith in the one who created us—we can put our trust in the one who supports us and nurtures us, as we faithfully live out the gospel in our community.

The priority of our faith is not only to worship God but to share our faith with others—to declare to others the truth of the gospel, no matter what the cost. It is God who will help us to overcome our fear and enable us to persevere. As you share your faith with others, may they see your faith as a beacon of light in a world filled with fear.

To God be all the glory, honour and praise. Amen.