Sunday, July 29, 1984
HOW TO DEAL WITH FEAR (NO. 1 IN A SERIES)
I John 4:18-21; Luke 12:22-32

Is there anyone among us who has not known fear? Fear in one form or another is a universal human condition. How we deal with it can make the difference as to whether our lives are happy or frustrated.

Another word for fear is “phobia.” Human beings have been known to have agoraphobia, claustrophobia, acrophobia, androphobia, pedophobia, anthrophobia, theophobia, demonophobia, and more. In one list, I counted more than forty different kinds of phobias or fears.

Some people are afraid of life, others are afraid of death, still others are afraid of both. There are those who are afraid of success and those who fear failure. Some fear the future; others fear change, and still others fear the good.

Some fears are harmful, others are helpful. For example, it is helpful to have a fear of fire, but if that fear is so magnified that one cannot even strike a match when necessary, then that’s a problem. Some fears are rational, others are irrational. I once knew a man who was so afraid of water that he could not even have a picture on the wall of his home of a ship in water. Even looking at such a scene would make him ill.

Someone has written that fear is our human inheritance — when we are born, fear is born with us. Consider the process of being born. Here’s one description.

Before we entered this world, we lived in the absolute safety and comfort of our mother’s womb. Unless we were a twin or triplet or more, it was a totally noncompetitive society. Our environment was warm and comfortable. We didn’t have to struggle, work, or perform in any way at all in order to have all of our needs met. We didn’t even have to be consciously aware of our needs or communicate them. Everything was anticipated and provided for. In retrospect these nine months of prenatal evolution will have been the most comfortable and safest time of our life. They will be regarded on some level in our subconscious mind as “the good old days.”

Then suddenly, for no reason we know of, we find ourselves being forced down a passageway that is inherently too small, into a world we know nothing about. In other words, we get born. Consider that from a perfectly supportive environment, we are suddenly thrust into a cold, brightly lit, noisy and seemingly hostile world. The question must occur to us, “What have I done to deserve this?”

As our first experience of human contact, we are grabbed, held upside down, and whacked across the bottom. Then our life support systems are cut off, our eyes are syringed with a painful solution, and we have to breathe for the first time. We then get taken away from our mother and are put in a room with a lot of other small babies, all crying and screaming as we are. There we lay alone, with no certainty that our needs are going to be met. We have just been introduced to our lifelong companion, fear.

Here we are, born into a world we don’t understand. We eventually get taken home where our mother does the best she knows how to put us in a comfortable environment. Of course, if there are visitors, we are put on display. It sometimes seems as if the scene of a baby being

exhibited when visitors come around is something like going to the zoo. Everybody's looking at us, examining us, prodding at us, poking us, hoping we'll perform. If we do, everybody says the keeper did a great job, the keeper being our parents in this case.

As babies we soon become aware that our well-being is dependent upon external sources. We realize that our survival is dependent on things in the external environment, and that those things we need are made available to us by others. It dawns on this that if we just lie happily in our crib, nobody takes much notice of us. This can become a very counterproductive realization.

Just being ourselves is not enough in most cases, we begin to realize. We've got to do something to get people's attention. If we just lie there being ourselves, our mother or father may not come to see us and if we are left unnoticed and unattended for long enough, we will go through emotional and physical pain.

Imagine for a moment that you are a helpless infant lying in your crib saying to yourself, "Now wait a minute. If I'm just lying here, nothing happens. If nothing happens for long enough, I start to have pains in my tummy; I start to get very wat and vey smelly. In the womb, there was nothing I had to do. But here in the outside world, simply being here is not enough. And then you would most likely say to yourself, "If simply being here is not enough, what's enough? What will I have to do in life to get what I automatically got in the womb?" We then come up with a brilliant one-word solution: anything. Well do anything that we think will work.

Consider another hazard of being born. Obviously, we have a much greater chance of being picked up, cuddles, played with, and held warmly if we are really wanted by our parents. But as a matter of statistical probability, 50 percent of the people born into this culture are not wanted. And it's hard for us not to take that personally. It gets communicated to us in verbal and nonverbal ways. Even though we use all our creativity and inherent love of life to produce the kind of caring, comforting, loving, playful communion with our parents that we are looking for, nothing works. We may thus conclude that there's something wrong with us.

Or you can be born into a family where the relationship between mother and father is very distressed. They may have planned to have you our of the belief that having a child would bring the marriage back together. Unfortunately, when you arrive on the scene there's no way for you to have known that. Nobody has told you that your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to save the marriage. You don't have any skills at marriage-saving. Besides, even in a well-established, healthy creatively functioning marriage, the arrival of the first child is difficult to get used to. It affects the relationship. Now suddenly there are three, not two. Even in the best of marriages, a lot of adjustment is required to accommodate the new arrival.

The impact of your arrival on a troubled marriage can be catastrophic. It's quite possible that you were born into a set of expectations people had of what you were going to do for that that were totally unrealistic. And this can be the beginning of the most debilitating fears of all — the fear that you are not enough, that you are inadequate and not worth caring for.

1. The point of all of this is: fear comes into our lives at a very early age through no fault of our own — fear of the unknown, fear of not being loved and accepted.

2. Secondly, note that <u>all fear is the fear of loss</u>. I want to say that again: all fear is the fear of loss. There is not a fear you can think of that isn't a fear of loss. If you fear pain, what you really fear is the loss of comfort. If you fear disapproval, it's really the loss of the kind of

relationship you had before you are disapproved that you fear. If you fear death, what you fear is the loss of life. If you fear change, what you really fear is the loss of the comfortable status quo. If you fear the future, what you really fear is the loss of the present.

Our birth itself, as we have just seen, represents a tremendous loss to us — a loss of comfort, a loss of security, a loss from our point of view of automatically being nurtured, of automatically having our needs met. So, we begin to perceive life as the thing which causes us loss.

And of course, life cannot be lived without loss. We lose our youth and become older — life is made up of a series of losses and gains. Some losses cannot be avoided.

Unfortunately, because there is a lot of loss in any life, some people begin to think of themselves as victims in a series of events over which they have little or no control. No doubt the man who shot all those people in a California restaurant, felt himself a victim. Thus, some people then begin to think of life as something to battle against, and all of life becomes a fight or a struggle, and then they come to see others as enemies instead of friends.

The central issue then for such people becomes — how can I avoid loss? And they are primarily motivated by the fear of loss. Once a person decides that avoidance of loss is what life is all about — then the most one can get out of life is nothing. Such an individual ten is filled with fear. He or she is always afraid of losing something.

To put it another way, once we become predominantly concern with the avoidance of loss, we have entered into a state of decline and we have let fear become the controlling force in our lives. This is exactly what Jesus was talking about when he said that those who seek to save their lives, that is spend all of their time trying to avoid loss of any kind, will lose everything — but those who give their lives away will gain everything.

Here then we already have some suggestions from our Christian faith in how to deal with our fears.

1. First, we need to remember that we are not victims in this life — life is not something to battle with — rather life is a gift. God desires good for all of us and not evil. There will be loss but we need not fear any loss.

In the scripture lesson read earlier, Jesus told his disciples — "Fear not little flock, for it is god’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.” In other words, God is a loving, giving God.

Earlier in the same conversation with his disciples, Jesus had reminded them not to be worried or afraid about their lives because God is in charge of the whole creation.

2. Secondly, and on a more practical everyday level, we begin to let go of fear — any kind of fear, when we give love to others.

Dr. Gerald Jampolsky has written a little book on this theme. Its title is “LOVE IS LETTING GO OF FEAR". What he does in this little book is to remind us in a fresh way what Jesus taught, namely, that in giving, we receive! It’s all part of the law of love. Under this law, when we give our love away to others, we gain. And what we give, we simultaneously receive.

As Jampolsky states it: “The law of love is based on abundance; we are completely filled with love all the time, and our supply is always full and running over. When we give our love

unconditionally to others with no expectation of return, the love within us extends, expands and multiplies. So, by giving our love away, we increase the love within us and everyone gains."

The law of the world, on the other hand, states that what we give away, we lose. We are taught by the values of the everyday world to be afraid of loss, and therefore to hold on tightly to what we have and in so doing we will gain. We come to believe that if we give something away we won't have it anymore. But when we give love away — we have more left than we started with. Giving it away increases it.

The world's way of doing things is based on a belief in scarcity. It holds that we are never really satisfied. We continue to feel empty as we vainly attempt to get fulfilled by seeking love and peace in whatever external forms we have come to think of as desirable.

The problem is that nothing in our external world will continuously and totally satisfy us.

When we are feeling unloved and depressed, fearful, and empty inside, finding someone to give us love is not really the solution. What is helpful is to love someone else totally and with no expectations. That love then, is simultaneously given to ourselves. The other person doesn't have to change or give us anything.

Too often, however, we believe that we have to get other people's love before we can feel love within. But remember, as Jesus told us, the way of love is different from the way the world usually operates.

The writer of the letter of First John in the New Testament knew this — "there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."

So, the way to deal with fear is simply to begin to be what you already are — a loving child of god, and begin to give love to others. Then whatever fear you have will be replaced by love. Amen.