

Reflection

March 16, 2025

Psalm 27

Luke 13: 31-35

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Title: How to lay down your fear in one easy step: Trust God.

Prayer: Loving God, there is a lot to fear. Help us put our trust in you, help us know you through the stories of Jesus and the words of the prophets so that we too can cast our fear aside, amen.

Today we are invited to lay down the burden of fear.

What are some things that might generate fear in us today?

- In terms of the global community we might fear WW3, Economic collapse, mass unemployment, division.
- In terms of creation we might fear an irreparable unhealthy planet, no more drinking water, food scarcity, continual extinction of species after species, fire after fire until everything is ash.
- In terms of top 10 lists we might fear success, failure, rejection, judgment, public speaking, flying, snakes
- In terms of our own lives we might fear a broken heart, grief we'll never be able to get over, lack of confidence, bullying, mockery, loneliness, disease.

There is a lot to fear.

I did some digging this week to see what people consider to be the opposite of fear. I found a lot.

Some say the opposite of fear is anger. Some say it's faith. While others will say it's hope, trust, joy, denial, or understanding.

Anger may feel like the opposite because it's dynamic while fear can be immobilizing, but one can be angry and fearful at the same time. Same with faith – we can live through fearful times with our faith intact. Joy and calmness seem to come in the absence of fear, not as its opposition. Denial simply delays fear, it doesn't remove it. And, we can have fear and hope at the same time. I can be hopeful for something to happen and fear it won't.

One psychologist talked of knowledge and understanding as the opposite of fear. If we can understand what we are in the middle of, or what is about to happen; if we can come to know it more deeply then perhaps we can begin to lessen the fear around it.

What if from a Christian perspective 'knowledge and understanding' meant trust. The more we deepen our trust in God's presence and action in our lives, the less we will fear.

Trust comes with knowing and understanding. The more we learn about God and the way God moves in our lives and in the world and through time, the more we trust God – trust in the power of God, the love of God, the presence of God, the delight of God.

Is trust in God the opposite of fear? Maybe.

We can find some juice for that in the scripture passages today.

Some call Psalm 27 one of the most profound prayers in the Bible. We learn through this psalm what it looks like to trust God:

- When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh
- when an army encamps against me
- when war rises up against me
- When my enemies are all around me
- If my father and mother forsake me
- When false witnesses have risen against me breathing out violence

... when all this has happens I will:

- Not fear
- Be confident
- Live in the house of the Lord
- Take courage
- Wait for the Lord

In the midst of actual or perceived danger, the psalmist continues to be confident in the power of God and in his faith in God. There is trust there. Trust built from a lifetime of focusing on God, obeying the Temple laws, learning about God.

The writer even says “whom shall I fear?” and “My heart shall not fear” because the trust in God is so great.

Turning to the gospel of Luke we meet Jesus on the long road to Jerusalem. When we left him at the transfiguration (way back in chapter 9) Peter, James and John saw him talking with Moses and Elijah and they were speaking of Jesus’ departure – crucifixion – which, the scripture says “he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” Here we are in chapter 13 and Jesus is still heading to Jerusalem. He won’t actually get there until chapter 19 – Palm Sunday.

The Pharisees warn Jesus about Herod. Back in chapter 9 Herod was confused by Jesus – he couldn’t figure out who this guy was that was doing all these wonders; and he wanted to see him. Now Herod wants to kill him.

So the Pharisees warn Jesus. Perhaps the Pharisees are filled with some fear on Jesus' behalf. They may not like him, but they may also see a little of themselves in him— a teacher; someone who loves the law of God and the people of God.

Imagine being witness to some of the debates they had over the laws and practices of their faith: masters in the knowledge of their faith debating interpretation and application of age-old laws. Exhilarating to say the least – I would have loved to be a fly on the wall.

But Jesus doesn't pick up on their fear. He says "you go tell that fox, Herod, for me that I have a job to do and I'm going to keep doing it until I'm done."

There is no room for Jesus to be fearful. He trusts God and will follow God's call for his life, no matter what.

Presbyterian theologian David Lose says the journey to Jerusalem was long because of what Jesus did along the way. He says "Jesus didn't die accidentally. He died precisely because he gave attention to those the larger world deemed insignificant and proclaimed a God who embraced and loved all, not just a few."

What Jesus did in those 10 chapters – that journey with many stops – is what we focus on. He taught and prayed and healed. He showed people through his actions what the kingdom of God was like.

We don't know, but I imagine Jesus must have been fearful at times – even though he was divine he was still human. And us humans, we can get pretty fearful when faced with threats and ridicule and torture and betrayal and abandonment and death.

Jesus gives us a model of how to focus on trust, not fear. How to take the time to learn how God is at work, understand our place in creation and therefore trust God.

Trust in a God who will not let us go. If we can grow our trust in God's presence and action in our lives as Jesus did in his; then perhaps we, too, can take the time to greet our neighbour, befriend a stranger, comfort someone in need, write a letter to our MP, stand up for the overlooked, live with our own grief, heal our broken heart.

We can take each moment as it comes and live into it with trust, not fear.

We can do these things in this world right now because we follow someone who did it too. We follow someone who trusted in God's sometimes outrageous call for his life.

We can ALSO do these things because we know that after Lent and Good Friday comes Easter Sunday. That Jesus' life and death and resurrection show us the full story of living with trust and not fear. The story that love wins out over death and hate and injustice. That God's love and blessing are present even amidst the parts of life that create fear in us. And, so we know we can trust.

So lay your burdens down. Today, lay down the burden of fear.

I titled this reflection "How to lay down your fear in one easy step: Trust God."

What if a deep trust in God will create a life where there is no fear?

Imagine!

Imagine if we could let ourselves believe this, trust this, live this.

Imagine if we trusted in God in such a way that we lived from the kingdom of God; that we had no fear in speaking out, in seeking justice, in caring for another. No fear of the ramifications, no fear of losing out, no fear of ridicule or failure or rejection.

Trusting in God doesn't mean the world will be safe. It doesn't mean failure and rejection won't happen. It doesn't mean this life won't be hard. It's hard all right. And, it doesn't mean this life won't be unfair. It's unfair sometimes. And, it's dangerous sometimes.

What it does mean is that we don't have to live this life in fear.

We don't have to live in fear.

So, is it true? Can we alleviate fear with knowledge and understanding? Will learning more about God deepen our trust in God and therefore diminish our fear?

We learn about God through scripture, the prophets who came before us, our own prayer life, paying attention to our connection to creation. When we read stories from the bible we learn how God saved and redeemed the people over and over again. We learn over and over again how God wants to be in relationship with us, with all creation. The more we work to understand how God is alive in us, the more we can trust God.

The more we can trust God, the more we can lay our fear down.

Imagine if our trust in God was so complete we lived a life without fear?

Imagine!

Amen.