

Lenten Devotional March 12, 2024

Scripture

Psalm 34

- 1 *I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.*
- 2 *My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.*
- 3 *O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.*
- 4 *I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.*
- 5 *Look to him, and be radiant;
so your faces shall never be ashamed.*
- 6 *This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,
and was saved from every trouble.*
- 7 *The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.*
- 8 *O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.*
- 9 *O fear the LORD, you his holy ones,
for those who fear him have no want.*
- 10 *The young lions suffer want and hunger,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.*

- 11 *Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.*
- 12 *Which of you desires life,
and covets many days to enjoy good?*
- 13 *Keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking deceit.*
- 14 *Depart from evil, and do good;
seek peace, and pursue it.*

- 15 *The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their cry.*
- 16 *The face of the LORD is against evildoers,
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.*
- 17 *When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears,
and rescues them from all their troubles.*
- 18 *The LORD is near to the brokenhearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.*

- 19 *Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the LORD rescues them from them all.*
- 20 *He keeps all their bones;
not one of them will be broken.*
- 21 *Evil brings death to the wicked,*

and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
22 *The LORD redeems the life of his servants;*
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

Devotion

The Rev. Jeff Bergeson '14

Ninety-one years ago this month, at the height of the Great Depression, Franklin Delano Roosevelt gave his first inaugural address as president. Into that tumultuous context, FDR spoke the words, "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Fear is a strange thing. In the Bible, we're told, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps 111:10; Prov 9:10). And yet repeatedly, God's people are told, "Do not be afraid." Even in today's reading, the psalmist declares "the LORD delivered me from all my fears" (v 4) and then goes on to commend and even teach "the fear of the LORD" (vv 7, 9, 11). So, which is it? Should we fear, or not?

I want to wrestle with this question: what *is* fear? When you're afraid of a spider, or your financial situation, or wars and rumors of wars, or the upcoming election, what is the fear in your heart communicating? I've come to believe that fear is essentially our heart saying, "This has some kind of authority or power over me." Occasionally it's a correct assessment of the situation, but usually it's not.

We know that love is fundamentally a good thing, but it can be misdirected or disordered, and so our perspective on love gets distorted. Similarly, I believe fear is fundamentally a good thing, but because we almost always misdirect our fear, we have a distorted view of it, and we miss the security that comes with fear properly directed, namely fear of the LORD (see Isa 8:12-13). Improper fear is a form of deception.

This Lent, may we not fear taking up our own crosses, because Jesus has come and set his people free from the fear of death (see Heb 2:14-15), seated us with himself in the heavenlies (see Eph. 2:6), and specifically tells us to fear no threats (see Matt 10:26-33; Luke 21:8-19). The LORD sees, hears, rescues, saves, is near to, and redeems those who fear the LORD (see Ps 34:15-22). If we are in Christ, what have we to fear? Nothing! Not even fear.

Prayer

LORD, I confess, I have not feared you alone. Jesus, help me to so seek, trust, and love you that I fear nothing else. Holy Spirit, come. Prune the rotten fruit of other fears from my heart, and fill me with yourself, that I may more closely follow Jesus, free from fear and full of love. Amen.