

Scripture: Matthew 17.1-9 (2)
Date: March 6, 2011
Service: Last Epiphany
Place: St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Palatka, FL
The Rev. Canon James M. Dorn III, Rector

“Get up and do not be afraid.”

Have you ever been so frightened of something or someone that all you wanted to do was to run and hide or have someone come to your rescue?

We all have been afraid at some time in our lives and we will be afraid again. It seems being fearful of something we do not understand or something we know is inherently evil is just part of how God made us. Fear even intrigues us and sometimes we even subject ourselves to being scared by riding a roller coaster or watching a scary movie, which can cause us to suffer through the dark of night frightened about what might reach out from under our bed and grab us.

I think many of us are really only afraid of 2 things and most of all of our other fears are directly related to them in one way or another. The first thing we are afraid of is dying and the second is being afraid of change.

Being afraid of dying is a faith issue. We either do not have faith or we do have faith in God that the promises He made to us through his Son, Jesus Christ are real and we will live in heaven with new bodies with all the other saints of God what have already died.

When we do not have faith we might be afraid of exiting this world and becoming ghosts, zombies, just plain dead, or even worse being reincarnated as a cockroach because we did not love our neighbors as we love ourselves. But when we have faith, the promise of eternal life and the joy of being saved from an eternal hell is real so that we do not have to worry about what will become of our souls because we know it will be glorious, because the only one who has been raised from the dead and ascended into heaven is Jesus Christ our Lord and Master who tells us eternal life awaits those who have faith and believe.

A dear friend of mine whose husband passed away several years ago, emailed me this story, which might put faithful living and faithful dying into perspective when we look at death through the promises of God.

As the doctor was leaving the examination room, his patient said, “Doctor, I am afraid to die. Tell me what lies on the other side.”

Very quietly, the doctor said, “I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? You a Christian man and yet you do not know what is on the other side?”

As the doctor held onto the handle of the door; from the other side came sounds of scratching and whining. When the doctor opened the door, a dog sprang into the room and leaped onto him with enthusiastic gladness.

Turning to the patient, the doctor said, “Did you notice my dog?”

He’s never been in this room before. He did not know what was inside. He knew nothing except that his master was here, and when the door opened, he sprang in without fear. I know little of what is on the other side of death, but I do know one thing... I know my Master is there and that is enough.”

When it comes to death, Christians have nothing to fear because our Lord and Master Jesus Christ has been transfigured, died, and raised from the dead so that every morning we can get up out of bed and not be afraid.”

Being fearful of change is also a faith issue because if we are afraid of change in our lives then do we really and truly trust God to see us through our constantly changing lives?

Our lives are filled with change and we cannot do anything about it because change happens whether we like it or not. Something positive we can do when our lives change is to approach the change with anticipation instead of fear, which is what Peter, James, and John did after Jesus said, “Get up and do not be afraid.”

Today Jesus' life and the lives of those who were with him changed forever when God transfigured Jesus on the mountain. This change marked a new direction for all of their lives, a direction, which scared Peter, James, and John. Change happened to them as it happens to you, and when it happens you must make a choice to either live in fear of an unknown future or defeat the fear it brings by trusting in God and by relying on the Holy Spirit for discernment and guidance.

When you act as the Disciples did and embrace what is changing in your life, even though you are afraid, you will be transformed into the person Jesus Christ wants you to become. Will the journey to accept change be easy? Probably not; however, no journey worth taking is every easy and the more difficult the journey and the change, the greater the reward.

Lent is a journey of deliberately changing your life by dying to your old self to become less worldly and more Christ like by Easter. The Lenten Season is the perfect time to reflect upon the behaviors drawing us away from Christ and with God's help, change what needs to be changed. And like everything in life, the more you put into it the more you will receive out of it.

If you are afraid of death, change, or the unknown future, listen and remember these promises the Lord has made to you.

“I tell you, my friends, don't be afraid of people who can kill the body but after that can do nothing more to hurt you. I will show you the one to fear. Fear the one who has the power to kill you and also to throw you into hell. Yes, this is the one you should fear. Five sparrows are sold for only two pennies, and God does not forget any of them. But God even knows how many hairs you have on your head. Don't be afraid. You are worth much more than many sparrows. I tell you, all those who stand before others and say they believe in me, I, the Son of Man, will say before the angels of God that they belong to me.” (Luke 12:4-8 NCV)

“The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:26&27 NRSV)

Let us pray,

Dear Lord Christ, we are fearful of many things, especially death and change. Forgive us when we turn in fear from change to a place that is comfortable and predictable. Strengthen us by your Holy Spirit and take away our fears so we may embrace change and our unknown future as we follow you always knowing you will never leave us or forsake us and will always love us. Amen.