

All Fear (anxiety/worry/sorrow, etc.) is Swallowed in God's Love

Romans 8:35-39

Lent 1b 2-18-24 Pastor Pufahl

If I showed you a box but you couldn't see what was inside, would you agree to hold onto it before finding out what it was? What if it turned out to be a really big spider or a tarantula, would you still do it? I don't know if I could.

I think spiders are definitely one of top ten most feared things in the world. Death, public speaking, heights...and spiders. I suppose I could throw snakes in there too. They can be creepy. And so, people are afraid of them. There is even a term given to those who have a fear of spiders – arachnophobia.

What do you fear? I think my fears have changed over time. Think about what you feared as a child. Maybe it was spiders. Or the dark. Or the basement. Maybe it was the fear of not getting the same number of cookies as your siblings. When you get older, the fears change. You are no longer afraid of the dark or basement, but perhaps it is not being loved or not fitting in during high school. Then you get older still and you fear losing your job or the test results from the lab work which was done. If you have children, perhaps you fear losing one or having one get sick.

Even the most macho men of all have some kind of fear. What is yours? Fear can cause a fight or flight response in us. What do you usually do? Fight or Flight?

But fear is not our only problem. We have anxiety caused by fear, worry caused by anxiety, sorrow caused because of all these problems. It consumes us. They say we should face our fears, but who really wants to do that? I have experienced a few times something I have never experienced in the past. Panic or anxiety attacks. If you have ever experienced one, then you know what they feel like. Not fun. What causes those? Fear, anxiety, worry, sorrow. Where do those come from? Do people actually feel those things?

Let's go back to the lesson. It begins: **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?** ³⁶ **As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."** Now for Paul to write this, people had to experience these feelings. In order to even consider the question...being separated from Christ's love, that thought had to cross someone's mind, right? Otherwise, why would Paul say these words? Then, he goes into some of the heavy hitters like trouble and hardship and persecution or sword! I'm sure if any of these would hit your home, you would have anxiety. What does anxiety or fear do to our faith? What does it usually do? Attack, right?

I find very interesting the very first word Paul uses in our lesson. Notice what he doesn't say – he doesn't say WHAT. He says WHO. All those items are more "things" or "WHAT'S." Those are inanimate objects. WHO would describe more an animate object, a person, a being. Who is this WHO? I think you know. The devil comes to us to use whatever he can to cause us fear and anxiety. Does he come with a loud and boisterous voice? Not really. It would be too easy for us to detect.

So, he comes to whisper. He uses trouble, hardship, danger. He says, "Where was your God on that one? Does he really love you? Perhaps the reason you are suffering is because God is punishing you for your sin!" How do those whispers affect us? We start to question...does God really love me? Did he really forgive me? If so Lord, if you truly love me, if you truly have forgiven me, then WHY am I going through this?

What is the devil's goal in doing this? It is more than just causing us pain. He does this to drive a wedge between us and the only real source of love. Paul said such. WHO (the devil) shall separate us...complete and eternal separation. The devil doesn't care about you. He wants you to suffer here and suffer forever. And where does all this lead? To fear, anxiety, worry, sorrow. The devil does this because he hates us so much.

And the sad part about this is, he uses these things to cause us to doubt God and his love for us. The devil hates us and he wants us to feel nothing but hate. And the sad painful truth is that is what we should deserve. The devil really doesn't need to use these awful situations in life to get us. Our sin speaks for itself. God says "DON'T." I say "DO." God says "AVOID." I say, "I WANT!" Those sins alone should have earned me God's hatred. Does your heart ever lead you to doubt? "Oh God, you know my sin. You know my mistakes. There is no way you could ever love me!"

To combat that, think of this...WHY does this devil continue to try to get you to fear, have anxiety, doubt God's love? Why does the devil continue to use these situations to get us to doubt? If in fact my sin has earned me God's hatred and anger and wrath, why would the devil continue to cause us such pain? Yes, he does it because he is just that awful and hates us that much. But why would he continue to try to get us if he already has us?

Because...he doesn't have us!

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ **For I am convinced that neither death** (the very thing we fear so much) **nor life** (and all of its components which go along with life), **neither angels** (you know, the good guys with power) **nor demons** (the bad guys with power), **neither the present** (which we wish we could change) **nor the future** (which we can't control), **nor any powers** (any government, any terrorist group), **neither height** (a fear thing right? so, the heights in heaven) **nor depth** (the deepest depths, farthest from heaven), **nor anything else in all creation** (this pretty much covers everything else which we can see and can't see), **will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Perhaps you have fears. Perhaps you are afraid of the dark or of the basement. Perhaps you are afraid of change in your life. What makes those fears go away? If you are a child who fears the dark or basement, those fears disappear when mom or dad holds you to show you it isn't that scary. If you have a change in your life to make, it is always a fear destroyer to know you have loved ones who are there with you.

In all these things we are more than conquerors through him (THROUGH JESUS) who loved us. Do you feel like a conqueror? I know I don't. I have fears. But, before you let those fears take over, just look and see who is holding on to you with his nail, scared hands. We may not feel like a conqueror, but Jesus makes us a conqueror. It is the reason why the devil keeps trying because he sees who holds you and the devil knows...he will never win! He wants you to believe you are not a conqueror, but when we see through eyes of faith who is the one who holds us...we are already conquerors.

Why? Paul said it...because he LOVES us! Jesus knows our fears. He knows what causes our anxieties. He feels our sorrows. And he tells us NONE of those things will ever separate us from his love! NONE.

So, what do you fear? What causes you anxiety? Look who is holding you. Jesus. Look what he was willing to do for you. His love for you is not just a word. It is an action. His loving action was going to the cross for you. Dying for you. Destroying your sin and all those things you may fear.

And the love which drove Jesus to the cross surrounds you this day and every day. It envelops you. It swallows up all fear and devours it. Oh, the devil can try but he already knows he has lost as he too sees that same Jesus holding your hand as you walk your journey to God's heavenly joys of no more fears.

Let's face facts. You have fears, you have anxieties, you have worries and sorrows. Every step they come at you. Every breath they attack you. The devil uses them to try to separate you from you God. He uses them to doubt God. To that I say what Paul said from God: **In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**