

Philippians 2:1-14 19th Sunday after Pentecost Oct. 19, 1990

I grew up in the Christian fear. People called it by another name, the Christian faith they said, but I knew what it really was. The Christian fear. If you do not walk the straight and narrow, the Lord will give you exactly what you deserve. Ezekial said it well, "when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die for it; for the iniquity which he has committed he shall die." The Lord is a god with very high standards, any serious sins and he just might give you the hell you deserve. The Christian Fear.

But as I grew in age and in understanding, I began to hear another word. Though I was unacceptable, for Jesus sake God had accepted me. Through Jesus Christ, God had named me a righteous person, he had declared that I was his beloved Son. The very highest honor that could ever come to a human being The Almighty God had given to me. Before all the world he declared in my baptism that I was holy and without blemish through Christ, the little baby held in my father's arms declared a righteous man, for all eternity a righteous man. This is the Christian faith.

Your story is no different than mine. The Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth, has given you a glory greater than any king or ruler has ever known, an honor higher than any won by any athlete, a beauty greater than all the stars in the sky, you are rightewous, pure and perfect through Jesus Christ. The Lord has said that is so when you were baptised, his word is good. Trustworthy. Sure.

This gospel is like the sunshine on a clear day. Nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Nothing can ever rob us of what Christ has granted us as a gift through his death and

resurrection. Not sin, not death, not the power of the devil. Where there is faith in Jesus Christ the sun is always shining through.

Still that dark cloud, the Christian fear is always hanging around. Jesus gave his life for me, surely he is going to expect something in return. He told that story about the two sons, one who said he would not go to work in the vineyard and then did and the other who said he would but did not. ^{Have you ever worked,} Am I that son who says, yes with my mouth, but with my life is saying no? Is my heavenly Father disappointed in me, so disappointed that he is going to turn his back on me?

Do you know what that dark cloud is like? Have you felt that feeling that God may not be smiling when he looks at us. All through the Bible we read about people who were going merrily on their way while the poor were being victimized, and idols were being worshipped, and priests and false prophets were saying to the people, "Everything's fine.

Take a look around us, everything's not fine. Our nation, our whole world is on the doorstep of war, the richer we get, the less compassion we feel for the poor. God is dishonored as his name is taken in vain, and as every person worships him as created in their own image.

Pastor, we need ^{more} preaching of the Christian fear in these days, some say to me. Tell the people what is right, what they must do, how God will punish them if they don't obey him.

A voice in my heart keeps whispering to me, we need more preaching of the Christian Fear in these days, Feed the poor or else. Clean up the TV shows and the movies or else. Honor God with your time, your talents and your possessions or else.

Sometimes it seems that the Christian faith is not enough. Tell people that through Christ they are righteous, holy and without blemish,

and they believe it and they just go down on the beach and sun themselves
in the sunshine of God's love. We hear that God has done everything for our
salvation in Christ and we gather here once a week to feel warm and fuzzy
while the world around us is going to hell. We become a pleased people,
pleased with ourselves and pleased with our God.

Now I know that Christ did not give his life, invest his own sweat and
blood in us ~~blood in us~~ so that we can just vegetate. Soak it up. He has
not blessed us with such tremendous wealth and talents and abilities so
that we can simply entertain ourselves. Yet I know that God does not want
me preaching the Christian Fear into your hearts. That is not the way to
life, but the way to death, *not to faith, but to despair*

In writing to the Phillippians, St. Paul held up Christ before them. *To people who may have had a tendency to be selfish & self-centered*
"Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though
he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be
grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in
the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and
became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has
highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and
under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory
of God the Father." *of you all actually to his own interest*

Not fear, but a faith that makes you Christlike, this is God's dream
for you. The almighty Lord has declared you righteous, has given you his
holiness and glory that you might be new, His new creation with the same
mind that Christ has had. He emptied himself for us, so therefore we look
not only to our own interests but also to the interests of others. q

Paul held up Christ. Look at Jesus, have his mind in you, give yourselves for others as he did. Humble yourselves in service as he did.

^{We do} realize that Jesus did not die for me that I might just wander merrily on my way. even as he declares us holy, without blemish, he dreams that in our living we will become just that. But no amount of commands and demands, no threats will make it happen. Fear will not make us holy. But seeing Christ, wanting to be just like him, generous as he is, giving of ourselves as he does, full of faith as he was in dying, these will make us holy. Fill your heart and your soul and your mind with Christ. Then love may indeed happen in your heart. And giving and service.

I hope for each of us that we will shrink in the Christian Fear. I hope for each of us that we will grow and grow in the Christian faith. I pray for us that Christ will be so in our heart and mind that we will begin to look like him in our living. Amen.