

"NO FEAR!"

(John 14:25-27)

© 2019 Rev. Dr. Brian E. Germano

[McKendree U.M.C.; 6-9-19]

--I--

1. Read Text: John 14:25-27 and Pray.
2. Some of you may remember that a number of years ago there was a popular slogan on bumper stickers, posters, and tee-shirts all across the country. In big, bold, brash letters it simply said... *"NO FEAR!"*

A--In its original context, this was often a way for someone to publicly flaunt how fearless they were about doing things that some might call reckless: bungee jumping off a bridge, skydiving, motocross biking, etc.

1--And, far from being worried about such things, it was, in fact, considered "cool" and a source of pride to have "no fear" about doing wild and crazy things.

2--But you know, for all the bravado and bluster of that phrase, it never changed the fact that we live in a world today driven by many different forms of fear.

B--In fact, there's even a website called "*The Phobia List*" (www.phobialist.com) which lists over 500 medically classified "phobias" (fears): For example,...

1--There's the fear of Bees- *Apiphobia*

2--The fear of bald people- *Peladophobia*, or of becoming bald - *Phalacrophobia*.

3--The fear of moving or making changes- *Tropophobia*.

4--The fear of bullets (imagine that!)- *Ballistophobia*.

5--There's even the fear of the color white- *Leukophobia*.

6--The fear of cooking - *Mageirocophobia*.

7--(One of my favorites...) The fear of sermons- *Homilophobia*

8--And (believe it or not) even a fear of phobias themselves -- *Phobophobia*

C--And yet, as we grow & mature, most of us begin to realize that the *real* causes of fear in life *aren't outward* things, but rather *inward* things over which we have no control.

D--I've counseled many people who think that fear represents weakness, and so they're great at wearing a "no fear!" mask, and *proud* of their ability to face *outward* dangers, but have *no clue* how to face and deal with the *inner* fears of their lives.

3. Well, today as we celebrate the birthday of the church (a day we Christians call *Pentecost*), I want to talk about these inner fears, and what the Bible teaches is their antidote.

--II--

4. First, let's talk about **what some of these inner fears ARE, and consider some of the EFFECTS they have** on our lives.

A--And let me begin by reminding us that by whatever *name* we call them, their effect is the *same*: they distort our view of reality and cause us to act/ behave in unhealthy and selfish ways. For example,...

1--Sometimes we fear feeling *inadequate* and *not measuring up to the expectations of others, God, or ourselves*, so we compensate either by trying to *dominate* others, or by *withdrawing* from others.

2--You show me someone who's either overbearing, controlling, manipulating of *others*, OR who's timid and afraid of *confrontation* with others, and I'll show you someone who probably struggles with issues of *inadequacy and insecurity* in their *own* personal life.

3--I know, because for much of my own life, I've struggled with the *latter* version of this, & when I'm not at my best, it occasionally even still rears its head today.

B--Sometimes we fear *rejection and emotional hurt* from others (of not be "liked / accepted" by others), so we engage in self-indulgent, sinful behaviors which soothe our feelings and isolate us from harm --...

1--...We use things like alcohol, illegal drugs, gambling, pornography, overeating, or a whole host of other addictions as unhealthy ways to deal with this fear...

2--...Because we're hoping that these will protect us from pain, or at least numb and anesthetize it enough for us to temporarily make it through.

C--Many of us fear *failure*, so we seldom (if ever) try anything new.

1--Maybe you know the story of the little boy who once learned to ride his new bicycle, but had an accident that left his arms and knees all scarred up. After that, he was so afraid of crashing again that he would always carry around a First-Aid kit that would often fall open as he drove his bicycle, causing him to crash again. Finally, someone told him: "*If you'll leave the kit at home, you'll be able to ride the bike and get on with life.*"

2--You know, there's a lot of us going through life today carrying "First-Aid kits" that merely cause us to crash -- we live in such fear of failure that we can never live lives of true freedom by risking anything *new*.

D--Some of us fear *loneliness*, so we retreat and isolate ourselves in emotional "turtle" shells, keeping us from having to deal with the discomfort that goes with being alone.

1--And within those "turtle shells," we gradually lose the ability to genuinely love and be loved, and instead become callous and apathetic to the hurts of others, (and at times, even resistant to others' attempts to reach *us*).

E--*Most* of us fear the unsettling consequences of **change** and **the unknown of the future** to some degree or another.

1--But *some* of us fear these *so much* that we're afraid to venture outside our comfort zones.

2--And so, whether it's in college, our career, retirement, or even fear of change in our *church* -- & at times our fear of the *future* is so great that we're like a deer who gets caught in car headlights: immobilized in the *present*.

3--Maybe that's why in his First Inaugural Address as U.S. President in 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "*The only thing we have to fear is fear itself -- nameless, unreasoning, unjustified, terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance*" (FDR's 1st Inaugural Address, March 4, 1933).

F--And I could share many other examples, but you get my point: inner fear can have devastating effects on our lives if we allow it.

5. So **what's the answer**, then -- **the "antidote" to inner fear**? Well, I believe it's given to us in Vs. 27 of today's John 14 scripture, where Jesus says, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you... Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*"

A--You see, according to this verse, the peace of Christ -- given to us through His Holy Spirit (the one whose presence we celebrate on "Pentecost Sunday") -- is the antidote to all the inner fears that we face in life.

1--Verse 27 explains the nature and character of this "peace" -- as Jesus says there: "*I do not give [peace] to you as the world gives [it]....*"

2--In other words, GOD'S definition of "peace" is not the same as the world's -- i.e., "peace" in the biblical sense is *not* simply an "*absence of conflict*."

B--As you've perhaps heard me say before, in the Bible the term "*peace*" (Hebrew *shalom*, Greek *eiréne*) simply means "*oneness; wholeness; completeness; healing*."

1--It refers to a Spirit-given *inward* assurance and confidence in the power and presence of *GOD*, even in the midst of *outward* turmoil and conflict.

2--Biblical "peace" doesn't mean a *lack* of fear, but simply a God-given courage to *face* our fears.

C--And that means that even though the Spirit's presence doesn't alter the fact that we're still *powerless* over outward things, nevertheless that presence *does* give us strength and courage to *face* those things and *not* be *controlled* by them.

1--That's why I'm not afraid of feelings of inadequacy like I used to be.

2--It's why none of us need to be afraid of failure, rejection, or loneliness in life.

3--It's why we don't need to be afraid of change or the future for our church or community or even our nation -- ...

4--...Because God's Holy Spirit gives us courage and strength to face them all!

--III--

6. So, what are the inner fears that you are facing in YOUR life today? ...the thing(s) that you're stressed or inwardly uptight about (even though you won't dare let anyone else see or know about it)?

A--Whatever they are, today's Pentecost scripture reminds us that if we'll give them to God and allow His Spirit to give us the "*peace that passes all understanding*," then our hearts will "*not be troubled*" anymore, and "*neither will [they] be afraid*"...

B--It reminds us that genuine God-given, Spirit-filled "peace" enables us (truly) to have "*NO FEAR*" in life!

7. **[With all heads and eyes closed, invite all to mentally place their fear(s) in cupped hands in front of them, then ask them to raise hands to God in surrender as I pray... PRAY]**
8. [HOLY COMMUNION]