

“Fear-Less”

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Matthew 6:25-34; 10:29-31*

What are you afraid of? What do you fear? Are your fears keeping you from living a hope-filled, determined life? Could you fear-less?

Of course some fears are “real”, “actual” and need to be recognized and coped with. For example, the terrorist threat to the Western world, the possibility that Conon O’Brian may leave NBC. Some real, some infantile.

But, there are fears that each of us carries within ourselves that hold us back; that keep us from stepping up, stepping forward; fears that drain our lives of joy, pleasure, hope. We need to fear-less!

What brought this to mind for me was an article in the journal, “Foreign Affairs.” Playing off Samuel Huntington’s essay of several years back, “The Clash of Civilizations” (which warned that future world politics would be dominated by world civilizations in conflict, i.e. The West and Islam. Much ink and conversation has ensued over this warning, whether it’s legitimate, or not.)

French author Dominique Moïsi has written, *The Clash of Emotions: Fear, Humiliation, Hope, and the New World Order.* He argues that in addition to a “clash of civilizations”, what has not been sufficiently recognized is a “clash of emotions.” Dominique then proceeds to divide the world into three parts; the West (the U.S.A. and Europe); the Arab and Muslim world, and much of Asia as the third area. As for the West (us) as living in a culture of fear; “a fear of the other, a fear of the future, and a fundamental anxiety about the loss of identity in an increasingly complex world.” Perhaps too exaggerated, but a germ of truth. In regards to Europe, fear is being invaded by the poor; fear of being blown up by radical Islamists, or being demographically conquered by them, as their continent becomes a “Eurabia”.

And there are additional fears.

Referring to the U.S., we too are fearful of decline, which includes a “growing questioning of national purpose.” Referring to both the U.S. and Europe; “What unites all these fears is a sense of loss of control over one’s territory, security and identity – in short, one’s destiny.” Over the top – but something is there.

He also delineates Islam’s culture of humiliation, and Asia’s culture of hope. It all makes for interesting and provocative reading. I would take issue with some of his interpretations, but overall, he presents a stimulating thesis.

Endeavoring to stand on the brim of history, there appears to be no doubt that cultures, societies, religions, have gone through, and go through certain times of greatness, mediocrity and decline. But, speaking within the West, it seems to me that the declaration of our decline is much overdone. It reminds me of Mark Twain’s rebuttal upon hearing of his own death in the newspaper. “I believe my demise has been greatly exaggerated.”

Nonetheless, this Frenchman has caught hold of something going on in the West. This Fear! We have been so taught (programmed) to question authority; to keep an open mind; to believe that all truth is tentative (exception the natural sciences and mathematics); to believe that our values, are just that, our values – not necessarily to be transferred – after all – they are just our opinions, and there are other opinions.

Is democracy to be a universal? Really? Is freedom actually for all humans? It may very well be that culturally we are in the throes of intense “fear”!

- Fear of where we are going
- Fear of the terror that besets us.
- Fear that we not have the tools (psychologically, morally) to hold on to who we are. Fear that we don’t deserve to hold on.
- Fear that there are not ultimate values to live and die for, but just tribal values, dependant on who has the biggest weapons of war.

I’m reminded of the Western intellectual of the mid-20th century, Jean Paul Sartre, “Life has no meaning, and values is nothing but the meaning that you choose.” Sartre could be the poster boy for this sickness of the West. This fear of the West.

We need to fear-less!

Recognizing the limits of human knowledge, recognizing that all cultures have their particularities, we must recognize some values transcend all cultures! The West must get beyond this existential fear, take from its intellectual, cultural, spiritual past and renew itself – once again declaring hope! And a major part of this re-absorption, this restoration will come from the heart of Christianity! Of course, not a return to Christendom, but to a reorientation of the ever forward looking, energized, hope-filled Christian ethos!

We have a wonderful message!

Now, let me wax Biblical (without being exclusivistic); Recall Matthew’s Gospel and the phrases of Jesus (as read this morning). What is being presented in these Biblical texts, of 2,000 years ago is a definite, thought out, well defined way of life!

Hear this! A way of life!

Do you know what these early Christians were first called?

People of the Way!

- A way of life!
- How one frames one’s life!
- How you get out of bed each day, or better, why you continue to get out of bed each day, Hopefully!
- Your orientation for life!

Sartre, Freud, Marx dismissed this as prattle, illusion. There is no meaning other than what you, poor fear filled, creature can muster!

But, Jesus saw it 180 degrees differently!

- Because there is meaning
- Trust exists!

You, You, You, all of us need not live in fear!! Fear of nothingness, emptiness, worthlessness. There is a plan!

My friends, Jesus offers a way out of fear, that fear that exhausts the human spirit, that fear that eclipses the worth and integrity of the human soul. Trust is needed to get beyond fear. (Trust in something. Trust in someone!) Fear-less!

Jesus says, “Look at the birds, they do not worry about making a living, yet God takes care of them. And you are of greater value! Oh, and the lovely, beautiful lilies. They just exist, not working, and yet they exceed the glory of Solomon

when he was on the top of his game. Listen – do not worry! Keep the fear level down, for God is with you!” Now Jesus is not describing the philosophy of economics, or the biology of birds. No. He is being a prophet, a poet, describing a way of life. And he is convinced, “You are in God’s hands! Come what may. You are in God’s hands!” So do not worry. Deal with fear, by understanding that the God of the universe actually care for you! Fear-less. There is a plan, a purpose!

Jesus continues his thought in Matthew 10. He’s saying, “Don’t let fear get you down.” Jesus is back to the birds, sparrows specifically. They are a dime a dozen; cheap; actually, tow for a penny. Even a sparrow falling to the ground is not ignored by God! These sparrows like other birds, don’t worry or fear, so why should you? You are of so much more value!

This foundational declaration has permeated the Western World, although it is presently sidelined to say the least. You – you need to, in faith, get beyond your fears and follow Jesus’ way – into hop! For yourself and for our future!

Trust in the God of love, purpose and hope! Be fearless!!!

Amen.