



**May I speak in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen**

The word of God which comes to us on this Harvest Thanksgiving Festival, surprises us with:

powerful and thought-provoking images inviting us to:

- ✚ step back
- ✚ and look around, beyond ourselves,
- ✚ to enable us to see that God's care and loving providence for all creation has been evident from the very beginning.

The images challenge us to be thankful that:

- ✚ we have a loving creator God who provides and sustain us and all creation.

I am confident that we who are God's loving children, created in his image, with the charge for the care of creation that these images would have stirred our enthusiasm to go and do likewise.

However, I believe that there is a bigger picture behind these readings which seem to be directing us to:

- ✚ that which would prevent us from being grateful.
- ✚ Namely fear.

- ✚ In the first reading from the book of the prophet Joel the prophet encourage all of creation not to be afraid because they have been:
 - ✚ redeemed by their creator
 - from their idolatry,
 - ✚ and that God is going to sustain them because of His generous and abundant love

In the gospel, Jesus told his disciples:

“do not worry about your life”

Worrying is a human condition:

- ✚ and we all do it,
- ✚ even though we know that seldom does it solves any problem.

But here in today's gospel passage Jesus points us to:

- ✚ a different way of being
- ✚ by pointing us away from worry
- ✚ towards trust in God our creator, redeemer and sustainer

In our reading from

1 Timothy, Paul Contrasted

- ✚ the folly of setting our lives upon the uncertainty of material riches
- ✚ against our call to be rich in good works and generosity,
- ✚ and the readiness to share.

Paul said that it is these things that will point us to the life we are created to live.

If we are able to loose the grip of undue worry and anxiety we will be much more likely to find the key to unlock the door to generosity and gratitude which will blossom into generosity of spirit that will spur us into action.

Therefore for me, all three readings for this Harvest Sunday, even though they all speaks of gratitude; underneath their focus is on fear and worry that prevents gratitude.

So Jesus told his disciples:

“do not worry about your life,

What is our greatest fear?

Undoubtedly, it is the fear:

- ✚ of losing our own lives;
- ✚ we fear the death of the body.
- ✚ Jesus the God-man knows this!.

So today Jesus tells us:

- ✚ not to worry about our lives
- ✚ and tells us not to be anxious about those things that only appears to threaten our existence.

When I am in love with God, when I am fearing” him above all things:

- ✚ I am rooted in a power that transcends space and time,
- ✚ a power that governs the universe in its entirety,
- ✚ a power that is greater than life and death.

The good news is that this power knows me intimately and guides me according to his purposes.

That is why, Jesus told his disciples:

“do not worry about your life” Trust God.

Paul Tillich, the German- American 19th century Christian Existentialist, philosopher and Lutheran Protestant theologian states that:

"The awareness of our finitude is called anxiety and that this exists in everyone."

Tillich also maintains that:

- ✚ basic anxiety
- ✚ and the awareness of finitude are identical.

Therefore it could be said that:

- ✚ fear is an existential anxiety that is born of our finitude.

It has been reported that since the outbreak of the Covid pandemic:

- ✚ more and more people are searching the Bible at least online
- ✚ And that the most search chapter is Isaiah 41:10 "Do not fear."

Consequently this passage has become the most read and the most book marked since 2020... People want to come back to it.

2020 was indeed a trigger year, with:

- ✚ Brexit,
- ✚ climate change,
- ✚ and with all that accompanies the Covid Pandemic, and will be remembered as a year that stirred up our anxieties.

The psychologist of the 20th century often talks of:

- ✚ Existential anxiety
- ✚ which speaks of the fear of things that threatens our existence.

And Covid has placed this threat right in front of us, accompanied by a number of participating threats, which consequently has brought about

- ✚ a deep level of fear..
- ✚ which is born of our finitude..

And this fearfulness is not surprising in a time when we have witnessed hundreds of thousands of our fellow humankind who have died and are still dying from this Pandemic.

This situation was even worse when most of us were:

- ✚ locked in
- ✚ and could not see each other,
- ✚ that alone would have stirred up some deep level of fears and anxieties.

One could argue that the Bible is a response to fear with:

- ✚ it's proclamation of the truth that.

"Perfect love (and that is what God is) cast out all fears.. Here in this proclamation is the primordial struggle between fear and love.

It is no surprise then that the events of 2020 kicked off an existential fear that caused people to turn to the Bible to find an answer to this spiritual problem.

So the first three words of the Isaiah reading Do Not FEAR, calls to mind today's gospel reading.

And Yes, there is a lot to be afraid of about this pandemic. ... And Jean Paul Sarre and the other existentialist, would agree that there is a lot to be afraid of..

But their advice would be..

- ✚ Accept the fearful situations..
- ✚ and live with it because that is life..
- ✚ c'est la vie..

And of course we are afraid... we fear all the time.

But remember that Christianity proclaims God's

- ✚ journey into the heart of what frightens us the most..
- ✚ (and that is His death upon the cross)..

It is this truth that gives us Christians the capacity to say to the world...

- ✚ "Do not be afraid,"
- ✚ even in the face of the worst suffering

The command "Do not be afraid,"

- ✚ is repeated throughout

the bible, ..voiced by angels, prophets,.. our Lord and is echoed by the evangelists.

- ✚ Fear not
- ✚ do not worry
- ✚ do not be anxious.

The pivotal hinge between the:

- ✚ old Covenant
- ✚ and the New Covenant, is when the angel Gabriel comes to Mary and tell her not to be afraid.

Today we see Jesus picking up that thread which the apostles have proclaimed throughout the rest of the New Testament.

This command is proclaimed most forcefully in our second reading from Paul's letter to Timothy....

Not being afraid is so essential to salvation history, and so God continuously remind us saying:

- ✚ do not be afraid,
- ✚ do not be anxious,
- ✚ let not your hearts be troubled ...

Paul Tillich said: Finitude unawareness is anxiety..in other words to be:

- ✚ finite
- ✚ and to know it,
- ✚ is to be afraid...

Tillich sets out 4 mark of finitude.

Namely, time, space, causality and substance..

It goes like this, as a finite person

- ✚ I live in time as we all do...
- ✚ does that produce anxiety?

Yes it does..

Where is time going?...it is going in one direction isn't it?

The saying goes:

- ✚ "I am not getting any younger".....
- ✚ time is always moving forward ... towards death... because we exist in time... we are heading towards death

And the existentialist would say:

- ✚ there's nothing we can do to stop it.

Therefore Tillich states that:

✚ "to live in time is to live in anxiety"..

Secondly we live in space..,

- ✚ we are spatial beings..
- ✚ we occupy a particular place

Does that produce anxiety?

✚ Yes

Think about how we feel when there is a threat to that space ...When we are chased out of our space by disasters

- ✚ Natural or unnatural ..
- ✚ by floods,
- ✚ plagues,
- ✚ hurricanes,
- ✚ mud slides
- ✚ or earthquakes. ..When the firm earth suddenly shakes under us...

Thirdly.., to be finite is to be caused ... what does it feel like to be contingent upon other things?

Our being is contingent upon our parents..

- ✚ we are contingent now upon this church building we are in. I
- ✚ we are contingent upon it's temperature..

Our being is contingent upon:

- ✚ the food we ate this morning...if food was taken away over a period of time, we would die.
- ✚ we are contingent on the drink that we can take in ..
- ✚ we are contingent upon the oxygen in the air,
- ✚ upon the atmosphere..
- ✚ the air we breathe..

The point is to live as a Caused Thing is to live in fear because any of those things could be taken away..

And indeed one day they will be taken away and then the health of my body will deteriorate.

Finally Tillich says...as a finite being I am a substance.

- ✚ I am not the sheer act of being in itself,
- ✚ that is what God is ..
- ✚ I am a substance..
- ✚ I am a thing..
- ✚ I am a particular... which means I can undergo substantial change.

That means I can be eliminated I can be destroyed..

Like any substance even a planet can be destroyed..

When I become aware of my finitude I become afraid..

Now what is the answer?

Existentialist say, get use to it, that is the way it is. But the biblical answer is not to be afraid. ...

Why?

Because the Bible orders us

- ✚ beyond our finitude, to a reality, namely God who alone transcends these limitations.

Think about it.. How do we name God?

Well, God is not in time,

He is eternal,..

He is outside of time,..

He is everlasting,...

- ✚ God is not in space
- ✚ God is ubiquitous we say he is omnipresent

God is not contingent upon causes outside of Himself because God is not a substance God is the sheer act of being himself.

So here Tillich has taken the classical language that we know about God and shown it's spiritual power.

So what does this all mean? ..

Well we cannot save ourselves, because we are temporal reality

- ✚ and I can't reach out to you because you are a temporal reality too.
- ✚ I can't reach out to anybody in this world because they are all in time as I am.

What does the Bible say?

The bible say that only in God will my soul be at rest.. therefore:

- ✚ it is only when I orient my life away from my own ego
- ✚ and away from anything else in the world, that I will be able to draw from the spiritual power of God
- ✚ will I be able to transcends these limitations that leads to fear.

Nothing in space is going to solve the anxiety that comes from being spatial..

- ✚ Only when I am ordered to God.

Nothing in this world is going to solve my problem of being caused,

- ✚ because they have all been caused too..
- ✚ they are in the same boat as I am.
- ✚ Only in God is my soul at rest.

The point is, if finitude awareness is anxiety then the only solution to that is to

- ✚ order my life to that which transcends all these things. Namely to God.. .

We can now understand why enshrined into the heart of the Bible again and again are these three words:

- ✚ don't be afraid,
- ✚ don't be worried,

✚ don't be anxious words coming from the voice of God.

In today's gospel reading, because Jesus knows that

✚ in this broken world we will be tempted to fear,

And so Jesus makes clear that there is no fear in love because perfect love cast out fear" (1 John 4:18)

Remember, Fear comes from a focusing in on our own finitude.

What is love?

✚ Love is overcoming the fear (..and the more I am and caved in on myself is the more afraid I am going to be.)

Love is always an extroverted move.

✚ Love speaks loudly..

✚ It the moves outside ..

The trajectory of love is in the direction of God:... (who is love)

This is why perfect love... which is God..

✚ cast out all fears.

Therefore, when I displaced my heart into Christ... Christ will live in me, enabling to handle my fears..

✚ my fears might not go away,

✚ but I now find something that is more fundamentally enduring.

Let us pray

We thank thee then, O Father,
For all things bright and good;
The seedtime and the harvest,
Our life, our health, our food.
Accept the gifts we offer
For all thy love imparts,
And, what thou most desirest,

Our humble, thankful hearts.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit Amen