

High Street Uniting Church

You are held in the care of God

Matthew 10:24 - 39



What are you afraid of? What is your dominant fear? We give names to so many fears – such as spider phobia – that the dominant idea is that we fear injury, suffering, and death. Dominant answers are usually

spiders, snakes, or heights. But when people are asked about their fears, the most common top answer is public speaking. Further interrogation on this reveals that most of us fear embarrassment, conflict, making mistakes, failing, or losing friends. Sure, we all have the natural fears of things and situations that threaten injury or death, but deep down we really don't like risking our social position, our relationships.

At first look there doesn't seem to be a connection between our two readings today – The Genesis account of the fifth day of creation and Jesus briefing the disciples on mission – beyond the mention of birds. The creation of all types of birds that fill the sky and God's care of sparrows. Those annoying little birds that hop around our café tables. Looking deeper, however, opens this issue of fear. Birds are the very symbol of fear, the smaller the bird, the greater the fear. Watch those annoying sparrows jump when people move, and you'll get the idea. Fear is the enemy of discipleship. Fear of failure – letting God down – or fear of embarrassment – losing friends or family. In almost every Biblical story of people meeting the divine or a heavenly messenger, the first words of the messenger are, "Do not be afraid." There's a fear that we aren't good enough for God. Jesus' answer to the fear in the disciples as they head off on mission is "Do not be afraid, you are in God's care, just as all creation, even the smallest bird, is in God's care."

When we looked at creation a few weeks ago, I pointed out the logical order of the days of creation – from land to birds and fish, to animals, to humans – but I think some people look at that in sort of a reverse order, assuming importance. People, created last, are most important, animals that can be farmed and harnessed are next and then down through fish to eat and birds to eat and then the annoying little birds. In another example of Jesus using extreme language to make a point, he tapped into that assumption of order of importance by talking about sparrows. God cares for the least in the order of creation, so how much more does God care for you! I can imagine the surprise, maybe even shock, among the disciples as Jesus talks about sparrows being in God's care; they don't even rate as a Temple sacrifice for the poor! If God cares for them, then what are we scared of!

Two weeks ago, I challenged you to introduce the light of God's love into every conversation and every encounter. Last week I challenged you to spread the word of God as far and wide as you can. And I am sure those challenges were met with a fear response of varying levels. What should I say? Will people listen or reject me? Will I lose friends? That sounds scary and embarrassing. We're not all evangelists. And that is true, we are not all called to the task of evangelist, and we aren't called to travel off in pairs like the disciples in Matthew's story, but we are people of faith with good news to share in this culture and society that

increasingly does not know that good news. Your reservations about sharing the story of God's love in Jesus Christ are not irrational, your fear is not irrational, because we are all subject to those fears of failure, fears of not being good enough, fears of alienating friends, or fears of embarrassment and rejection. And just because we aren't being sent out on a walking mission in pairs, doesn't make this story from Matthew irrelevant. Jesus says, "Do not fear the enmity of the world, you are of great value to God."

Now you are possibly thinking, "It's all very well for Jesus to say, 'Do not be afraid', he's the Son of God. And it's all very well for Matthew and the others to pass on these stories, they're respected apostles, who am I?" But this story and its message of 'Do not be afraid' is part of the much larger story of Jesus. He was bold and forthright in preaching the message of God's love and care and it got him killed, but his life was held in God and his resurrection is the message to us that there is something more happening than this world and its dangers. Do not be afraid because your life is held by God. That is why Matthew, and the others, were forthright apostles, they knew that their real life was held by God and not in the control of those who didn't like what they were saying. We have the traditional stories of the gruesome fate of many of the apostles, that didn't stop the others, or the next generation of apostles.

Jesus doesn't just say, 'Do not be afraid' the way that some people say 'Calm down' to try to get people to calm down. No one in history has calmed down because someone told them to, and no one in history has stopped being afraid because someone told them to. He gives a reason to combat your fear by saying respect God more than you respect those you are trying to reach with the message of God's love. Respect for God doesn't just pop up when you need inspiration to share the message of God's love, it begins in how you live as a disciple each and every day.

Is prayer and reflection on God a part of your daily or regular practice? When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, it wasn't just about a set of words, the lessons include private, regular prayer. Reading scripture to understand God's will and to understand the world is an important part of showing your respect for God. Gathered worship is not meant to be the only way to 'top up' your spiritual tank or show your respect for God.

Are generous love and compassionate action a part of your living? The deep abiding message of creation is that we are all the product of God's love. A truth that underlies the 'Golden Rule', in that we treat others as we would like to be treated, doing it because we are no more worthy of love and respect and care than any other person created in the image of God.

Working every day on your respect for, and connection to, God is the way to reduce the fears, to calm the concerns that you will, somehow, disappoint God when you are called to account for the faith that you hold. God cares for all of creation, even the smallest bird, so you are held in God's care, be bold in sharing the love of God in word and in deed.