

Do Not Be Afraid

by Linda Rex

February 19, 2023, Transfiguration Sunday—What might God do if you were willing to let him take you somewhere you don't want to go or ask you to do something don't believe you were able to do? Is it possible that God might do more than you could ever ask or imagine? (See Eph. 3:20.)

Think of how Jesus was thrust into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. In the midst of that dramatic confrontation, Jesus was pushed beyond human limits. But in the end, he stayed true to his heavenly Father in the Spirit, and all of us as those who share his flesh. And he experienced an amazing victory—a victory we all participate in today by the Spirit. (See Matt. 4:1-11.)

I don't know about you, but I tend to choose things that I'm certain I can do or can at least figure out and do. When I'm asked to do more than I am capable of doing, the "fear of failure" monster creeps in and removes any confidence I may have that I can accomplish what God is asking of me. The problem with this way of living is that there is minimal room for the Spirit to work great things in and through me, and life ends up often being about me walking in the flesh rather than in the Spirit. And it also means that I am walking by sight rather than by faith.

What about that "fear of failure" monster? I'm caught by the lyrics of the song by Zach Williams which came out a while back called "Fear is a Liar." Here's a part of the refrain:

Fear, he is a liar
 He will take your breath
 Stop you in your steps
 Fear he is a liar
 He will rob your rest
 Steal your happiness
 Cast your fear in the fire
 'Cause fear he is a liar

How often do we refuse to follow Jesus simply because we're afraid—afraid of failure, afraid of looking different, afraid of what people might think, and so on? We may even discover that we are afraid of God—of what he might do or not do, and believe that our heavenly Father doesn't really love us (though Jesus seems to). How often do we let fear get in the way of seeing things as they really are?

Today is Transfiguration Sunday on the Christian calendar. Our reading in the gospel, Matt. 17:1-9, reminds us of and moves us to reflect on when Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on the mountain, and was transfigured before them. In that moment, Jesus' external form began to reflect the true essence of who he was on the inside—God in human flesh. As eyewitnesses of this fantastic event, these men could not forget the powerful experience of seeing Jesus in this way, and remember the fear and awe which overwhelmed them and drove them face down to the ground in response.

Jesus was not appalled by, nor was he put off by their response. No, he tenderly touched them and told them not to be afraid. He had specifically chosen them to be eyewitnesses of his glory in this moment. It was never his intention to frighten them or to overwhelm them. Rather, he believed this experience was an essential part of their spiritual development and preparation for what they each were going to face in the years ahead when he was no longer present on earth in his human flesh.

Peter was deeply touched by the words of our heavenly Father, who spoke of the belovedness of his Son. Not only was Jesus beloved of his Father, but his Father was well-pleased with him. In

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that great pleasure of our Father in his Son, we find ourselves swept up, for Jesus was bearing in that moment our human flesh in his person. How is it that our heavenly Father could be well-pleased with his Son, when his Son was bearing our human flesh?

I believe this says something about who we are as those who are meant to reflect the image of God in our persons. We have a divine dignity given to us by God, which was marred by our turning away from God to ourselves and this world. Blinded by the lies we believe about God and ourselves, we struggle to see the truth that God loves us, is committed to our best interests, and desires to live in face-to-face relationship with us now and forever.

It is Christ, coming and taking on our human flesh, to live our life, die our death, and rise again, who brings us into the midst of the fellowship of Father and Son in the Spirit. We can take comfort in the reality that God isn't opposed to us, but is opposed to evil, sin, and death, and has taken and will take every step needed to once and for all eradicate them from us and from our world. He will not stop until he had finished what he has begun in us—this is our comfort and peace.

What about our fears, especially our “fear of failure?” God's perfect love expressed to us in Jesus Christ reminds us we have nothing to fear. Jesus, who is God in human flesh, has personally come to us and has touched us, telling us, “Do not be afraid.” Jesus has done, and will do all that is needed in this moment and in the next, as we turn to him in faith and trust him, allowing his Spirit free reign in our hearts and lives. May we trust in God's perfect love and allow him to do what only he can do—save and redeem us, through Jesus our Lord and by his heavenly Spirit.

Dear Father, thank you for your faithfulness and love, expressed to us in the gift of your Son and your Spirit. Grant us the grace to turn to you in faith, to trust in your love and grace. May your perfect love cast out all our fear, through Jesus and by your Spirit. Amen.

“For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased’—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” 2 Peter 1:16–21 NASB