

Theme: An invitation to Face our Fears with our Friend

We have been on a journey deepening our relationship with God and rediscovering God's dream for the world. A dream expressed in God's desire for all of humanity to have an intimate relationship with God, with each other and the whole of creation. Rev Trevor Hudson has been our companion as RandMeth in this journey of lent, allowing us to explore anew the power of God's offer of this intimate relationship. In this journey, we are called to respond to this invitation of a loving relationship with God as our Divine Friend. This week, we explore God's offer of friendship as an invitation to face our fears.

What is fear? In the oxford dictionary, fear is defined as an emotion caused by the threat of danger, pain or harm. This emotion is triggered by many things, both external (such as the fear of snakes) or internal (such as fear of disappointment). Though fear is a natural emotion, Rev Hudson in this chapter highlights the negative impact that fear can have on our lives and the quality of the relationships we keep. He points out that some fears can sabotage our lives by impacting negatively on our emotional and physical health. Some fears can cause us to build walls around ourselves and keep others out, leaving ourselves isolated and lonely. Most tragically, Rev Hudson points out "fear undermines our friendship with God" (Hudson, 2015: 95). In this, he asserts that fear sabotages the desire in humanity to leave out God's dream for our lives and our world. It brings us off-tune with God's desire for us to live in relationship thus being off-tune with God's design and dream for the world. That may be the reason why, much of Scripture exhorts us to 'fear not.' The greatest challenge of faith, when seeking an intimate relationship with God, is to put into practice this exhortation. Furthermore, it is to live not only alert of fears that threaten our quality of life but also be aware that they can undermine the desire to live out God's dream. Therefore, in our reflections this week we will, together with Rev Hudson, engage the question, "how does living more consciously in friendship with God reduce our levels of fear?" Which is a question Rev Hudson engages in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of his book, *Friendship with God: How God's offer of intimate relationship can change your life*.

In exploring this question, Rev Hudson points out the following ways we can follow on how to live consciously in friendship with God in order to reduce our fears:

1. Acknowledge our Fears.

Like the disciples in the boat with Jesus (see Mk. 4: 35ff) when faced with the raging sea and rough winds and the great danger of sinking, had to face their fear head on. They had to admit that they felt their lives were under threat and need not act courageously nor hide their fear or try to cover up how they feel. Rev Hudson highlights that the danger of living in denial of our fears is that, "we can easily end up in bondage to what we refuse to acknowledge....and being controlled by them" (Hudson, 2015: 97). Looking honestly at our fears is an essential in this invitation to an intimate relationship if one is to live freely and fully. What are the fears you often don't talk about but are there and prevent you from living out the fullness of the life God wills for you? Some rarely spoken about fears that Rev Hudson highlights are:

- a) Fear of knowing our real selves, both our strengths and weaknesses.
- b) Fear of being vulnerable; causing us to hide our weaknesses and hold a public image of having it all together.
- c) Fear of the cry of the poor, the suffering and the desperate and finding ourselves overwhelmed by not knowing how to respond.

*Prayer: God, help me to face my fears honestly and cast all my cares to you. Loving Friend, grow in me the faith of Jesus that allows me to trust that in every storm, you remain in control. Amen.*

d) Fear of God; sometimes based on the negative feelings we may have towards God and our misunderstanding of the biblical command to fear God. Fear in this case of the biblical command, is better seen as an invitation to a relationship of respect and reverence for God rather than being scared of God.

**For personal reflection: What ignored or denied fears do you have that you feel this season of lent calls you to face honestly? Could it be the fear of ill-health in this time of the outbreak of the Coronavirus? Fear of losing a loved ones? Fear of the unknown future? Fear of what will people say?**

## 2. Telling our Divine Friend

The second way we can reduce our fear is when we, like the disciples in the boat, tell Jesus about our fear and anxiety. We find in the story, that it was when they approached Jesus and named their fear in His presence that they witnessed the power of God revealed in Jesus. This moment, which Rev Hudson calls a 'gospel-moment,' of sharing their fear with their divine friend led to a divine encounter. This divine and personal encounter is what, I believe, will bring us to a closer relationship which God passionately longs for with us. It is during raging storms and rough winds of life that who will call on for help matters the most. Not only are we reminded of Christ as a friend who is in the boat with us, the story reminds us that when we call on Him, he has the power to calm the rough seas. Therefore, telling our fears opens us up to witnessing a divine and personal encounter. I personally find interest in the fact that Jesus does not remove them from the boat nor the sea. But he rather gives a divine rebuke to the waves for calm, causing them not to be absorbed or distracted by their fear. They will still have to navigate through the sea and arrive safely on the other side of the shore, but now they will do so with the clarity that the task at hand requires. What does this image mean for you?

**For personal reflection: What had been your experience of telling God about your fears? Do you find it easy or difficult to tell your fears to God and why? What Scriptures can you find that give you confidence to share more of these fears with God?**

## 3. Living Beyond Fear

The last 'how to' we find at the end of the story of the boat, with Jesus challenging the disciples to greater faith. Rev Hudson points out that they had left everything- their families, their jobs- and followed Jesus. Therefore, they had already exercised a great level of faith. For Rev Hudson, the question, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have faith?" was not that they did not have faith in Jesus but that for an intimate relationship with God, they needed the faith *of* Jesus. In explaining, Rev Hudson points out that Jesus was in the same boat with the disciples that was under danger and threat, but Jesus remained asleep till the disciples woke him up. Why? Rev Hudson points out that this is because "Jesus was so confident in the Father's care that He fell asleep on a pillow in the back of the boat" (Hudson, 2015: 103). Therefore, this exhibited the faith that Jesus had in God the Father, his knowledge that God is still in control and the confidence in God's continued presence even in the storm. This is the kind of faith that led Jesus to the cross even when knowing that it might not protect him from being tortured. But He did not live in fear but trusted in God's greater vision and mission for the salvation of all of humanity and a restored relationship without the burden of sin. Therefore, the disciples needed not so much faith in Jesus but the faith of Jesus.

**For personal reflection: What does it mean to have the faith of Jesus right now in your life? What would the response of one who embodies the faith of Jesus be during this time as a nation? How do you experience being invited to grow in the faith of Jesus in your life?**

*May God bless us all. Rev T*

*Prayer: God, help me to face my fears honestly and cast all my cares to you. Loving Friend, grow in me the faith of Jesus that allows me to trust that in every storm, you remain in control. Amen.*