



A Note from the Pastor's Corner

Wow! It's 2010 already. Well, almost. And, just think – about ten years ago the big fear factor / money raiser was about the Y2K computer bug. Remember that, and how it morphed into being the end of the world? And right there with the fear-mongers were a few “religious” type folk who saw an opportunity to make a quick buck or two by selling books that gave advice to non-believers on exactly what they needed to do to prepare for the end of the world. The question I had was: if the authors *really* believed what they were writing – that the end was at hand – then why in the world would they be asking so much money for their book?

Since then, there's been one fear-inducing announcement after another. We've heard of mushroom clouds, code orange, anthrax, shoe bombers, duct tape and plastic sheeting, death panels, “killing granny”, fascism (among other -isms), and so on. Some were based on fact, others on conjecture, and many on pure fiction.

I think it may be the result of too much of a good thing. (Without getting philosophical about it, I'll just say that free speech is a good thing.) Gone is debate and discussion, having been replaced with diatribe and tirade. Now that we have a free and open communication system in the internet, costly journalism is giving way to free opinion. When you add to that the plethora of cable TV stations and talk radio shows that use a news-type format to present ideology and opinion (which, when pressed about it, use the defense of “we're simply entertainers, not journalists”), it's easy to see how facts get squeezed out of the picture. The question that then hangs in the air, then, is, “What should I fear the most?”

Arriving close on the heels of fear is distrust. The targets of the fear generators are not persons or institutions as such, but thoughts and ideas that run counter to their strict, unbending ideology. For example, we can trust our government to launch a war over the fear generated by the thought of a mushroom cloud, but cannot trust our government to provide a means for all persons to have access to quality health care out of fear of socialism.

This steady stream of fear over “what will happen if _____” leaves people not sure who to trust. It allows suspicion to enter into otherwise stable relationships and leaves people feeling isolated and alone. Long term, we are becoming less a society that cares about neighbor and the greater good and more a collection of individuals that care only about self and self preservation. And following distrust is hatred.

The church participates fully in this as well. It seems to me that it's one of the few ways in which the Church is a leader. There's the fear of those who are not Christian; the fear of what will happen if we no longer allow our schools to coerce children to recite a prayer; the fear of what will people think of us if we allow gay people to worship with us; the fear of allowing women to preach in our churches; etc. Fear turns to distrust, and distrust turns to hatred – even in the Church.

When the author of the second letter to Timothy writes, “For God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline,” [2 Tim 1:7] he did so because, among other things, fear fractures and destroys the sense of community. And we know how important the concept of community is to Jesus. Of the many ways he expresses it, in my opinion these words say it best, “By this the world will know that you are my disciples, that you love one another.”

If those who take the name “Christian” were to truly love as Jesus loves, there would be no room for fear and distrust. The church would not have to be afraid to fellowship with those they do not like or who do not fit their traditional view of things. Loving one another would put an end to the fear-generated hatred that some groups of Christians have for other groups of Christians. It may even have an effect on the fear-based hatred that has taken root throughout our society.

This year, I'm asking you to set aside such New Year resolutions like, “I'm going to stop smoking; I'm going to stop over-eating; I'm going to start picking up my dirty socks.” Instead, do this. Resolve to live out the promise of your baptism. (And if you've not yet been baptized, what are you waiting for!?) Resolve that you – *you* – will help the Church become a beacon that will lead it and our nation out of the darkness of fear, distrust, and hatred others have lead us into. Resolve that you – *yes, you* – will become one who models and leads with love instead of one who follows and fumbles in fear.

It is, after all, up to you to move beyond apprenticeship in becoming like our Master. No one else can do that for you. And if you think it doesn't matter what you do, say, or think, then take a look around you. There are others watching and listening, thinking – maybe even hoping – that they may catch a glimpse of Jesus in your life.

So, what's it going to be in 2010 and beyond?

Grace and peace, Pastor Bud