

Sovereign Fear

Psalm 8

When President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, “The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself,” he was, of course, wrong. It was 1932. The Great Depression had the country by the throat. Desperate men were hopping trains to California, hoping to find work in the fields and along the way stealing food from towns the rail lines passed through, towns like Terre Haute. Bands of armed vigilantes were forming to beat back the hobos. Much of the topsoil of Kansas and Oklahoma had blown away. Diphtheria and cholera, once nearly eradicated, had come back with a vengeance in our eastern cities. People were scared. Scared to death. And with perfect justification.

We're scared again. A virus has invaded us. We cannot see it. We do not know whether we will catch it, how bad it will be if we do, or how many loved ones will fall victim. Our lovely, nuanced, reticent news media have not missed their opportunity to make money by stoking the flames of panic. Social media can be a dumpster fire in the best of circumstances; today it has become a nuclear waste repository of punks determined to “own” those they hate by clubbing them with conspiracy theories and uninformed, crazy extrapolations of predicted suffering. All of which makes this preacher feel as though he has never had a more important message to deliver. That message: fear not. God's in charge.

You did not ask for my advice. You know what always follows that statement, do you not? Here comes my advice.

Severely ration your news consumption. Stop allowing people driven by ratings to feed you their flaming globs of speculation thinly disguised as “information”. Unfollow anybody on social media who claims to know catastrophe is coming. Turn off talk radio. Run everything you do hear through a filter. That filter must consist of your faith in God and God's good intention for creation, your experience of love in the network of relationships you have been blessed with in your family and church family, and the calm determination to test everything you hear against the best, most reliable, most scientifically-grounded information at your disposal.

Quit keeping score about who is “winning” this crisis. Here's a little secret: ***nobody is winning***. Oh, I have faith that we will eventually win together. As a people, as families, as a church we will survive this thing even though some will die to this life from Covid 19. But nobody is winning an election on the back of this thing. November is still a long time away as politics counts time. Quit wasting your emotional and spiritual energy on polling data. Start spending these precious resources on your relationships, your relationships with brother and sister human beings, and your relationship with Jesus Christ.

Fear not, God's in charge. King David wrote Psalm 8. He had gone to war. He'd had to flee for his life on more than one occasion. Diseases his people

understood even less than we understand this novel corona virus had ravaged through his people again and again. Yet he could write, “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth!” And, “When I look at the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars which thou hast established; what is humanity that thou art mindful of us, and the children of humanity that thou dost care for them?” David's faith in God and God's sovereignty, God's absolute power, had not failed.

Nor had David's faith in our position in God's order. He wrote, “Yet thou has made (humanity) little less than God.” He added that God had given us dominion, stewardship, power over creation. Fear not, God's in charge. And God still has big plans for our part of God's plan. If we are going to steward the animals, the earth, the church, we need to gird our loins. We need to step up our game. Find your power in the Word of God. Someone this week said, “Time is what we have these days.” Use your newly-given time to enter into a habit of Bible study. Consider joining our newest ministry at Central: Bible and beer. I kid you not, this new group meets at 7:30 pm on Wednesdays under the coordination of elder Scott Racop. (We're meeting virtually for now. Scott will send you an invitation to join the relevant meeting.) I love his slogan for this group: What would Jesus brew? But for all the laughing this is a serious ministry. Use it, or whatever discipline works for you to study your Bible.

And make social media work for you, as well. Never has this technology had greater promise. We on the church staff are already using virtual meetings, emails and Facebook in new ways to maintain our connections. We need each other in all

times. In frightening times we need each other more. Facetime your loved ones.

Telephone your older church brothers and sisters. Post encouraging words on social media. Pray that your faith might resemble King David's, that no matter what comes, you will rest in your faith in a loving, sovereign God.

Fear *is* fearsome. Praise God that we have been given the power to sustain our spirits in the face of the worst trouble. Tap into God's Holy Spirit, which is nothing less