

Dare To Faith Your Fear!

March 17, 2019

Pastor Tom Ford

Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church

Pasadena, California

Luke 13:

[31] At that very hour some Pharisees came, and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."

[32] And he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, `Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.

[33] Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.'

[34] O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!

[35] Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, `Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

"I am certain that my fellow Americans expect that on my induction into the Presidency I will address them with a candor and a decision which the present situation of our Nation impels. This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." (Franklin Delano Roosevelt - 1st Inaugural Address, March 4, 1933)

FDR said this as the country faced the worst situation since the Civil War. But did you know he said this on March 4th, when, on February 15th, as he was about to address a huge throng in Miami, five shots rang out in quick succession from a distance of 40 feet. Blood spurted out from the hand of a nearby Secret Service agent. Chicago Mayor Cermak, sitting right beside Roosevelt, crumpled to the ground. A woman standing behind FDR was hit twice in the abdomen and two other people were wounded. Roosevelt sat immobile and unflinching, his jaw set, ready for what might follow. He had been spared by inches. At the critical moment an alert spectator, Mrs. Lillian Cross, had hit the assassin's arm with her handbag and spoiled his aim.

Interim Pastor Tom Ford



Hill Ave Grace
Lutheran Church



FDR ordered the Secret Service chauffeur to stop the car, already starting to race away. He ordered that Mayor Cermak be put in the back of the car and then told the driver to get to the hospital. During the drive, FDR held Cermak in his arms and told him, “Tony, keep quiet—don’t move. It won’t hurt if you keep quiet.

The assassin, an unemployed thirty-two-year-old Italian bricklayer, Giuseppe Zangara, acted alone. He had bought his revolver at a pawnshop on North Miami Avenue for eight dollars. “I have always hated the rich and powerful,” he told police. “I do not hate Mr. Roosevelt personally. I hate all presidents, no matter from what country they come.” After Cermak died on March 6, Zangara was tried, convicted and executed for murder.

After the shooting, Roosevelt remained at the Jackson Memorial Hospital until Cermak was brought out of the emergency room. He spoke with him for several minutes and then visited the other shooting victims. About 11:15 he returned to his lodging for the evening. If he had been unnerved, it did not show. “All of us were prepared, sympathetically, for any reaction that might come from Roosevelt now that the tension was over and he was alone with us,” one of his aids recalled.

“There was nothing. Not so much as the twitching of a muscle to indicate it wasn’t any other evening in any other place. Roosevelt was simply himself - easy, confident, poised, to all appearances unmoved.

“FDR had talked to me once or twice during the campaign about the possibility that someone would try to assassinate him. But it is one thing to talk philosophically about assassination and another thing to face it. I confess that I have never in my life seen anything more magnificent than Roosevelt’s calm that night”¹ said the aid.

The implication is that FDR was not afraid, was not rattled to the core of his being. Most scholars attest to FDR’s absolute brilliance at masking his true feelings. I believe he was very scared and deeply rattled. And when he got by himself late that evening, he had a few drinks and smoked heavily. No one who spoke so eloquently about fear could have been immune to it.

Fear is a universal human trait. There is no human being who is not afraid at some time or other. And the greatest fear is the fear of death, be it premature or expected. Our minds simply are not able to conceive of one’s self as not existing. Try it sometime and see how fast your mind will divert to something else.

So, we have Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, sweating profusely and praying, “Father, let this cup

¹FDR, Jean Edward Smith, Random House, New York, pp. 296-298.

Interim Pastor Tom Ford



pass from me ...” Jesus did not have a death wish. Like you and me, he liked living. But he knew that there are some things worse than death. Like, going against the will of God. “Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.”

And in today’s Gospel, when Jesus is warned by the Pharisees to high tail it because Herod Antipas wants to kill him, Jesus says, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.’” Jesus knows Herod Antipas is a murdering monster. He knows Herod is out to get him. Yet, he knows he has a mission to accomplish. And that mission has to be pursued, even in the face of death threats. What sustains him and enables him to move ahead in spite of any earthly fears is faith, faith in and from his Heavenly Father.

JFK was warned strongly by Adlai Stevenson and Chief Justice Earl Warren not to go to Dallas. Earlier in 1963, at the request of RFK, Gen. Douglas McArthur, a friend of the father Joseph P. Kennedy, met the brothers in the Oval office. They asked him to make inquiries about the growing volatility focused on JFK. All that was later repeated was that he told JFK and RFK, “You are surrounded by your enemies”. We do not know what enabled JFK to go on to Dallas, in spite of the threats and personal fear. Perhaps his faith. Or his high propensity for risk taking. Or his trust in the Secret Service. Or the persuasion of LBJ and the Texas votes they sought for re-election. We just don’t know.

What we do know is: the real issue for you and me as Christians is not trying to know everything that will happen so that we can eliminate our fears and worries. The fears aren’t going to go away. They’ll always be there in some form, to some degree. Some days more. Some days less. The real issue for us, as Christians, is: faithing our fears! There is a difference between facing our fears and faithing our fears. Let me try to explain.

Jesus tells us in another place in the Gospels not to be led astray and not to be alarmed. Yet there are so many who are at work to lead us astray and to fuel our fears about the end of the world, about who should and shouldn’t be President, about terrorism, about the economy, about illegal immigrants, about this, about that. Whole industries have been developed and presidential candidates have evolved to feed our fears, all the while making a killing off us as we buy their books and movies and allow ourselves to be captivated and captured by their hidden political agendas and mesmerized by their heretical, distorted theologies.

There isn’t time in this service to go into the specifics. It’s a big subject and needs our attention, as millions upon millions of Americans, and many of those around us in Pasadena, are under its spell.

There is no doubt; the world will come to an end. And our lives will come to an end. But we deal with

Interim Pastor Tom Ford



73 N. Hill Avenue • Pasadena, CA 91106 • 626-792-4169 • www.hillavenuegrace.org

our fears and anxieties about these things with faith. We “faith” our fears. And there is a big difference between facing our fears – something we allow ourselves to believe we can do – and faithing our fears – something God does for us.

Faith is a gift of God. God gives it to us. We only hold out our hearts and receive it. Using Jesus’ feminine image of God as our Mother Hen, with the gift of faith we allow Mother Hen to gather us under Her wings.

Remember, Martin Luther wrote:

I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith . . . On the last day he will raise me and all the dead and will grant eternal life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.

And, Martin Luther also wrote, and we sing: “Though hordes of devils fill the land all threat’ning to devour us, we tremble not, unmoved we stand, they cannot overpower us. Let this world’s tyrant rage; in battle we’ll engage! His might is doomed to fail; God’s judgment must prevail! One little word subdues him.”

Our faith is simply this: God loves us! Jesus saves us! The Holy Spirit guides and sustains us! No one or anything can or will ever change this. Everything will one day be all right and be made right. Right now, though, we are to do all we can to live lives of gratitude for God’s love by working to make this world closer each day to the way God wants it to be.

Let me close by telling you the story of one Christian who is a great example of what it means to faith fear. And who did this in the face of the Armageddon of Hitler and Nazi Germany.

He was a pastor and teacher named Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and he taught at the University of Berlin. Distraught over the complacency of the German church, which was quickly falling complacent to Nazi Party ideals, Bonhoeffer became a founding member of a new church, the “Confessing Church.” But in 1940, the Gestapo issued an order forbidding Bonhoeffer from speaking in public, and the following May he was forbidden from printing or publishing.

That same year, Bonhoeffer began working to gain support for the resistance, which opposed the German government by helping Jews escape the country to Switzerland. He also participated in an unsuccessful attempt to kill Hitler by bombing his office. The Gestapo eventually discovered Bonhoeffer’s activities and arrested him. He was hanged in 1945, 5 days before the Allied troops liberated his Flossenburg concentration camp.

Interim Pastor Tom Ford



Hill Ave Grace
Lutheran Church



While he was imprisoned before his death, Bonhoeffer wrote: "Faint not nor fear, but go out to the storm and the action, trusting in God whose commandment you faithfully follow; freedom, exultant, will welcome your spirit with joy."

On the morning of his execution, he led a service for the Christian prisoners. At the place of his execution, before climbing the steps to the gallows, he prayed again. The only witness to his execution later wrote: "I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God."

Our sermon hymn today, written by Bonhoeffer in his last days before his execution, shows us how he was able to faith his fears. Focus on the words. The hymn itself is the ending of this, God's Holy Word to us today:

**By Gracious Powers
By Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

**By gracious pow'rs so wonderfully sheltered,
and confidently waiting come what may,
we know that God is with us night and morning,
and never fails to greet us each new day.**

**Yet is this heart by its old foe tormented,
still evil days bring burdens hard to bear;
oh, give our frightened souls the sure salvation,
for which, O Lord, you taught us to prepare.**

**And when this cup you give is filled to brimming
with bitter suff'ring, hard to understand,
we take it thankfully and without trembling
out of so good and so beloved a hand.**

**Yet when again in this same world you give us
the joy we had, the brightness of your sun,
we shall remember all the days we lived through
and our whole life shall then be yours alone.**

**By gracious pow'rs so faithfully protected,
so quietly, so wonderfully near,
we live each day in hope, with you beside us,
and go with you through ev'ry coming year.**

AMEN!

Interim Pastor Tom Ford



Hill Ave Grace
Lutheran Church

