

**BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI**  
**THE WORSHIP OF GOD • SEPTEMBER 30, 2018**

**Psalm Litany**  
**Psalm 124**

Had it not been for the Lord,  
**we would have been utterly destroyed, swallowed alive**  
**by forces and powers beyond our control.**

Had it not been for the Lord,  
**the current would have taken us under, the raging waters swept us away.**

Had it not been for the Lord,  
**we would not have escaped, not flown away like birds fleeing the net.**

Let us pray:

**We place our lives into your care, O Mighty One, Creator of heaven and earth. Amen.**

**The Scripture**  
**Luke 12:32-34**

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Creator’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

**The Message**  
***Reeling in Love***  
**Nick Larson**

This morning, we close out our final chapter in our “Take Heart” series, where we have explored how fear continues to grip us and wrestles away our humanity. Just to bring it home, this week, I had pretty much the worst anxiety dream of all time. It was pretty awful, so I’m even a little hesitant to share it all with you this morning. I don’t know that I really want to share it with you, but I guess I need to, because that’s what this teaching series has been about, fear and anxiety.

So yea, this is bad. Prepare yourself.

I dreamt that I was a pilot, a pilot of a commercial airline jet, flying with a plane full of people and...I crashed it. I did it; it was my fault. Then my dream continued where I had to go to all the funerals of the people who died and talk to their families and look at their coffins.

Give me showing up to class in my underwear any day! I will take walking into class without my pants on...sure, no problem compared to that.

Actually, I still have that dream on occasion, too. If you're in school right now and you're thinking, I can't wait till I'm out of school, so I can stop having these school-based anxiety dreams. That never happens. At least, it hasn't for me. I still have that dream where I didn't go to class all semester, and now I have to take the final.

Turns out, in doing a little research, I learned that anxiety is the most common emotion felt in dreams. That makes me wonder if anxiety is, in fact, the most common emotion felt – you know – in total.

I'm feeling like right now anxiety is my most common emotion. Despite preaching through an entire series literally called "Take Heart, It Is I, Do Not Be Afraid" based on fear and anxiety, it is right here with us.

I, too often these days, continue to find myself anxious. I'm anxious if I'm going to do the right thing. I'm anxious about what is to come. I'm anxious about how, when, and why our country's leaders are going to make important decisions. A friend of mine told me that it is as if he can almost sense the anxiety and tension through his keyboard. I'm anxious about whether or not I even remembered to give the dog his medication this morning. I'm fairly certain I didn't.

It seems, these days, everyone is terrified. We are terrified mostly, in one way or another, of not having or getting enough.

That brings us back to our text this morning, from the Gospel according to Luke. I want to give it a little context, so if you brought your Bible with you this morning, turn with me, to the beginning of Luke, Chapter 12.

*Verse 1: "When a crowd of thousands upon thousands gathered, so that they were crushing each other, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples."*

Here Jesus starts to warn those closest to him, and all those other thousands, at least the ones in ear shot, not to have a mismatch between their hearts and their lives. He goes on to explain that what we may wish to be hidden and covered over will come to light. He tells his disciples not to fear those who can hurt you in this life but be careful of what might hurt you in the next one. And then he reminds them how no one is overlooked or forgotten by their Creator.

Then Jesus launches into a series of teachings, mostly in his common question and answer format, or even more often, in his question and question format. Our text, this

morning, is the end of one of those teachings. Yet to understand it better, I want to back us up one story, to the parable before it. This parable may be familiar to you, it starts in verse 13: *“Then someone from the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”*

Jesus jabs back, *“Who appointed me referee between you and your brother?”*

Yet Jesus follows that quip with a statement about how one’s life isn’t determined by one’s possessions, even when someone is very wealthy.

Then he tells the parable, sometimes referred to as the rich young fool.

Verse 16” *“A certain rich man’s land produced a bountiful crop. He said to himself, what will I do? I have no place to store my harvest! Then he thought, here’s what I’ll do. I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. That’s where I’ll store my grain and goods. I’ll say to myself, you have stored up plenty of goods, enough for several years. Take it easy! Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself. But God said to him, ‘Fool, tonight you will die. Now who will get the things you have prepared for yourself?’ This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and aren’t rich towards God.*

*“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Therefore, I say to you, don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or about your body, what you will wear. There is more to life than food and more to the body than clothing.’”*

Then Jesus goes on to talk through how our anxiety can’t solve our problems or add days to our lives. Then he concludes with our text this morning: *“Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father delights in giving you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to those in need. Make for yourself wallets that don’t wear out – a treasure in heaven that never runs out. No thief comes near there, and no moth destroys. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be too.”*

We’ve spent our series exploring the depths of what to do with fear, and how to handle it. Jesus spoke to his followers back then, and still challenges us now to live with courage, to respond to fear with confidence.

Like much else in life, Jesus isn’t saying that we should never have anxiety or fear. Jesus is saying humanity looks in the wrong places.

I once read a story of a man who arrived at the Canadian border north of Detroit on his bicycle. Behind him on the rack, he had a box full of sand. “What have you got in there?” ask the customs official.

“Nothing.”

“Well, let’s just check it out.”

The customs official raked his fingers through the box of sand. Finding nothing he waved him on. A few days later the man was back again, with the same box of sand behind his seat, on the bicycle.

“Well, what have you got this time?”

“Same thing, nothing.”

This time the official took the bicycle and turned it upside down, shook it out, took the box apart, but still he found nothing. For weeks, the scene was re-enacted, each time the customs official certain he was going to find whatever it was this man was smuggling through. But he never did.

Several years later, the customs official, now retired, was having himself a few beers in a bar in Detroit. Suddenly he spied the erstwhile cyclist coming through the door. Hailing him, he bought him a drink and said, “Look, it doesn’t mean anything to me now that I am retired, but I am curious; what was it that you were smuggling all that time?”

“Bicycles.”<sup>1</sup>

It never occurs to us to look upon something with fresh eyes, to see what it is that we might learn from it. We will never be happy or helped by the world’s response to fear, which is almost always violence or seeking security. We will never be helped by God’s power, at least not as the world judges power.

If we want God to remove our fear completely, then we are looking in the wrong place, and we will miss the love and grace that God is offering us! If we are waiting for a world without fear to stop being afraid, then we will always remain afraid. The gospel message is, “Don’t be afraid, little flock,” for all the things that truly matter cannot be taken from you.

As long as we are basing our security on grain, then we will miss the gifts that come through the life Christ has to offer. We will never be helped by God’s power, at least not as the world judges power. We are only going to be helped by God’s weakness.

God’s undertaking is to bring about peace to the whole, hostile world. God wants worldwide disarmament, to beat our swords into plow shares and pruning hooks, to offer forgiveness in the face of anger, to forgive 70 x 7. God wants political and spiritual disarmament. God wants us to stop wielding fear like a weapon.

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<sup>1</sup> Read in the William Sloane Coffin sermon “Power Comes to Its Full Strength in Weakness.”

And to break through our defenses, God arrives defenseless, utterly defenseless. Remember the incarnation, the Christmas story; nothing but unguarded goodness in a manger!

Meanwhile, we go to extraordinary lengths to protect our tender egos. It never ceases to appall me just how low one will sink in order to protect what he or she has put in place. How far will we go to tear down perfectly good and full barns in order to build even bigger ones, so that finally we might feel like we have “enough,” as if *any* amount will sooth our existential anxiety? No sooner are we out of diapers than we begin constructing our suit of armor.

Then isolated by the fear, we feel the fear we cause, we get lonely and become even more anxious and uncertain. Then the cycle continues. Around and around we go. The more fear we feel, the stronger our defenses. The more accusations that come at people, the more fervently we insist we did nothing wrong.

Christ invites us to break this cycle when we consider how we too came into this world, naked and with open hands. One of the reasons we love to hold babies, or puppies, or kittens, for that matter, is that they don't threaten us. They respond to that yearning in all of us to be disarmed, which may be why the incarnation is so appealing. Our isolation and anxiety is killing us. We are tired of this clanking armor, of bumping masks with one another. Living on the outside of everyone and everything, we long for substantial relationships.

Friends, it is time to reel in love, to hold open your hands. I'm serious. Close your eyes and pretend for a moment. Mary has just taken Jesus from her breast, has turned to you and said, “Here, hold this child for a moment; will you?”

Wouldn't that undo you, to hold in your arms all God's love for you? I can't think of anything that would undo me more. And that, I suspect, is precisely God's plan for each of us: to undo us, to send us reeling in love.

God is offering every one of us a chance to be undone, to break the cycle of anxiety, to cast off fear, and reel in love. First, you need to put down all those things that you are holding onto, so that you might have open hands to receive God's love, like a baby being passed into your waiting hands.

God's love is dizzying and dazzling, and it will certainly cause you to reel, or be set off kilter for a moment or two. Accepting God's unconditional love is admitting that it's all right to be weak. It is only wrong to pretend we are not weak. It's all right to be full of doubts. We are invited to receive grace.

Now, I know it's hard to step out from behind that suit of armor. We all know the greatest expenditures of our personal defenses are caused by guilt and anxiety. We are often our own worst enemy causing us to hold back the gifts we were given storing them for future years, rather than sharing them with others.

Our real sin, even here at Broadway, may be that although we belong to an endlessly bountiful world, to a rich church, yet often enough we don't think big thoughts. Our members are incredibly talented, yet Columbia remains so full of need. We haven't even finished loving West Broadway yet – let alone the world.

Fear shows us we need God, and that real danger exists. But after that, its usefulness is over. Christ's grace is all you need; power comes to its full strength in weakness. We are talking a strength greater than the strength of the strong. For God's strength is victory over the self.

Jesus is saying that when fear arrives, we have the choice to welcome it, and ask that anxiety and fear, "What might you teach me, old friend?"

We, as finite creators on this earth, do not often get to choose the circumstances upon which we find ourselves, but we do get to choose our response to them. Sometimes, particularly in this day in our country, we are handed fear, or someone wielding dangerously his or her own anxiety, attempting to draw out something in us as well.

But we can choose, as I shared last week, to cast out that fear. We can throw it into the middle of the lake, to get some distance from it, so that we might have open hands to receive that which we are reeling in, reeling in love.

I want to leave you with one last story from my week.

In this time of transition for our church community, there is a myriad of emotions and responses, even within us as individuals on any given day. So, when someone asked to meet with Terry and me, we imagined all the possibilities and even speculated as to some of the likely reasons for calling the meeting. Fear was crouching outside the door.

Imagine the lift in our hearts when the reason to meet was appreciation for the beauty of the expressions of mission and ministry they witnessed at the ice cream social. Imagine how the room shifted when they said they had grain and goods, and no desire to build bigger barns, but a trust and hope to build the ministries, no strings attached, through this church. They wanted to make a sizeable, over and above, donation to the church, all while pointing to their hearts, hopes, and passions. They wanted to put their treasure where their heart already was!

Before the end of our meeting, they shared their confidence that the word for our church is “forward,” and not “fear.” Despite all that has taken place, they have no fear for our church. From their blessing and abundance came this gift in a day where the building of the kingdom, the church, our mission, and our hearts was a message of love that sent us reeling.

It's good to have open hands, so that you might receive pure love when it comes calling.