

**FEAR ITSELF**  
**Sermon for Lent 2C: Gen15:1-12**  
LPC, 2/28/10

On Ash Wednesday and again last Sunday I said that my theme for this season of Lent would be “Remember that you are a child of God.” I have spoken about how part of remembering that you are a child of God, especially in Lent, is to examine yourself for behavior and attitudes that are inappropriate to those of a child of God. Today I want to talk about a specific behavior and attitude that is particularly inappropriate to a child of God. I’m talking about fear.

Now sometimes fear is unavoidable, such as when a person is in a genuinely dangerous and terrifying situation. The most afraid I have ever been for my very life was while camping in a small tent on a beach during a thunderstorm so intense the sky never darkened between lightening strikes.

People are legitimately afraid when their lives are in danger. Nature built us that way as a survival mechanism. People enduring the earthquakes in Haiti and more recently in Chile have certainly felt this kind of fear.

This immediate fear has certain characteristics. First, the source of fear is easy to define. Second, the danger was real. Finally, the fear passes with the source of the fear.

There is another kind of fear that is much more destructive. This is the kind of fear that people carry around chronically. The source of this fear may be specific or more generalized. It may start, for example with fear of losing a job, and turn into a vague but abiding conviction that something bad is about to happen. There may or may not be a real danger. This kind of chronic fear, as opposed to the immediate fear of a thunderstorm, never really leaves a person. Very few of us are entirely free of this kind of fear.

Personally I think that’s why our political processes seem to be so ineffective these days. People on all sides are carrying around a lot of baseline fear, and it comes out in suspicion and defensiveness and digging-in, which are not conducive to compromise and cooperation and actually getting things done, given our form of government. The chronic fear that people carry seems to be paralyzing our government’s ability to actually accomplish anything.

Feeling immediate fear in a dangerous situation cannot be avoided. Carrying around chronic, paralyzing fear is not appropriate to a child of God.

We have in our selection from Genesis this morning a story about Abram. God has promised Abram him a family and land, both signs and symbols of security. But Abram, approaching old age, still has no children and no home. He is afraid for his future, much like many of us. God speaks to Abram, telling him not to fear and renewing his promises. The text tells us that Abraham “believed the

Lord and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.” It sounds as if Abram has, through an act of will that stands up against his fear, made a conscious decision to take God at God’s word.

Later on, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is incited to fear Herod, who, it is said, wants to kill Jesus. Like Abram before him, Jesus has decided to take God at his word and refuses to fear. For Jesus at least the danger is real, but this doesn’t prevent Jesus from taking a stand with God against fear. If you want to know what would Jesus do, here it is: believe God and don’t be afraid.

Neither Abram nor Jesus tells us there is nothing to fear. In Abram’s case, given his age, there is a very real chance that he will die childless and homeless. In Jesus’ case, as we well know, there is a very real possibility that he will die in Jerusalem. He does in fact die in Jerusalem. Yet both of these children of God choose to stand with God against fear. Abram shows us that this may have to be an act of the will, a conscious decision. It is not that fear is no longer felt. It is that the person consciously turns from fear and stands with God. The emotion is acknowledged, but the will intentionally chooses to act as a confident child of God.

You have heard that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. By contrast this is how the kingdom of heaven is built: A person says, “I choose not to base my behavior and attitudes on fear, but on the promises of God.”

Every time a human being takes a stand with God against fear and the other enemies of the cross of Christ, the kingdom of heaven comes closer. In one person’s life there may be a million of these small decisions. Each one is a victory for heaven.

Remember that you are a child of God. Choose to stand with God and not with fear. Choose to believe God’s promise of salvation. God will move heaven and earth to save you from the sources of your anxiety and fear. In Jesus, God *has* moved heaven and earth to save you.