

Fear and Love

1 John 4: 7-21

Psalm 27

Monsters, Inc.

August 23, 2020

Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

1 John 4: 7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Psalm 27

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh— my adversaries and foes— they shall stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord. Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up. Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence. I

believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

Here ends the reading of God's Holy Word.

A few years ago I flew out to San Francisco, and I admit I was one of those geeky people who stare out the window for the entire duration of the flight. I was mesmerized by the views, by flying over neighborhoods in whichever state as I had no real idea where I was without artificial borders, by crisscrossing the wide Mississippi River, and especially by the magnificent, snow capped Rocky Mountains. I even watched out the window on take-off and landing to see the work and tasks of our flight on the ground.

I really do love to fly, the anticipation of a trip, the experience of getting there. Flying is not just a means to an end, just a transportation to where I want to be; but for me, a part of the trip itself. Now I won't go far enough to say I relish the security and the lines and all those other things that airline travel has come to mean, but I also know that I am in a minority of people who really do enjoy the flight.

It is even on my bucket list to take a flying lesson. Just one lesson. Just enough to have the cockpit experience.

But if you asked me 20, 25 years ago, what I thought of flying, I would've told you that I had never flown, and would never fly. I had a fear, a deep fear, of flying. It was not the typical fear of flying, the fear of the plane crashing, or the altitude, but the very thought of being on a plane would give me an overwhelming sense of claustrophobia. In no other situation am I claustrophobic, but even the idea of being on a plane, the mental image of sitting in an airborne tube without the ability to just get up and go out when I wanted to, was a smothering fear, and the stuff of my nightmares.

So how did I get from being a claustrophobic flight resister to a geeky airplane window tourist? How did I get from a *fear* of flying to a *love* of flying?

Love is exactly it, love moved me from the fear of it to the love of it.

In all my years of traveling, there was never an incentive, any reason, for me to think about overcoming my fear. There was no where I wanted to go, or thought I would go, that required a plane trip. There were plenty of other ways to get around that kept my feet on the ground where I could get up as I wanted, and claustrophobia was not a part of it. Cars, trains, and buses were enough. No problem.

Well, no problem until my daughter transferred colleges and went to school in FL. Nearly 1400 miles was not a car, bus or train ride that I would have had the roundtrip time for. The love for my daughter called me to finally face the fear of flying. This was the first situation where I realized how much control this fear had over me. Wanting to see Monique, where she was living, what her life was like, pushed me to quit giving into my fear. The tradeoff of waiting until she had a chance to come home and see me was not enough. I was more afraid of missing my daughter's life than I was of flying. I refused to be afraid of it any longer, and booked my first flight. I was white knuckled for the trip from Boston to Orlando, but seeing Monique waiting for me at the airport, just hours after I had been at home, dissolved the fear of flying, and it didn't take long for my love of flying to grow.

I have learned that often a fear is based in anticipation, so that reality is less scary and intimidating than what was expected. It's been said that conquering a fear brings exhilaration, and that is certainly true.

From Alaska to London, from Paris to Panama, I have been reminded how love overcame fear.

Fear can be a monster that takes over our lives, controls and manipulates us in ways we do not even realize. To be sure, there are certainly plenty of realistic fears that save our lives because we heed and respect the warning to be fearful, but there are also those fears that do us harm more than good. Those fears can be redeemed, transformed by love.

Monsters, Inc. is absolutely right- fear is a powerful fuel. The dark, the unknown, can be a scary place. Monsters, those who lurk under our beds, hide in our closet, or take up residence in our imagination at any age, threaten our security and our confidence. Fears make kids scream, and they make adults defensive and controlling, all to avoid what it is that scares us.

Mike and Sulley know all about fear, it is their job to know fear, to create it, and profit from it. Their entire community of Monstropolis depends on the fears, the screams, that Mike, Sulley, and their co-workers can create. They create the kinds of fears that every child knows, the types of fears we remember from our own childhoods, the types of fears that hold us back no matter how old we are, the types of fears that make us doubt our own abilities and capacities, the fears that make us anxious about failing, or maybe even succeeding, the types of fears that cause us to reject one another because of skin color or sexual orientation, the types of fears that hold us back from stepping out in faith, the types of fears that blind us to what we can really do.

It takes someone like Boo to use love to stop the fear. Boo, sweet and innocent, saw Sulley not as the menacing closet monster he had always been, but as a “kitty”, a creature as sweet and innocent as she. To Boo, Sulley is lovable because she chose to love him, rather than fear him. She *chose* to see him as being lovable, even though he offered no qualities or attributes that would be lovable. Boo loves Sulley unconditionally, and in doing so she takes away any sense of fear, and in fact, her love goes on to change Monstropolis and the world.

Fear may be a powerful fuel, but love is a far greater fuel.

The psalmist confidently affirms that the Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? We are encouraged to know that we can face any fears— they shall stumble and fall. Even if an army encamp against us, our hearts need not fear; though war rise up against us, though pandemics, though the fears that hold us back rise up against us, we can be confident in the God who abides with us, the God who loves us, even in the midst of our fears, and on through them.

Fear may be a powerful fuel, but love is a far greater fuel.

In John's letter to the early beloved Christian community, he is emphatically confident that God *is* love, and that we are therefore called to love one another. Such faith and such confidence might make you ask where this strength, this trust, comes from. John lived in a time of war, famine, drought, illnesses, religious infighting; all the same things, realities, and fears that had been happening throughout history. Yet he did not look around him- or look back- in fear, but in a clear and bold confidence. John looked to see what was lovable about God's world, not what humanity had made unlovable or to be feared. John looked to see what made humanity lovable, rather than unlovable.

John looked not at the fears across history, but instead to the greatest love across history, to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He looked at the quality of love in Jesus, the love for his parents, his disciples and followers, for those he healed, taught and fed, and even for

his enemies. The most loving person, the Son of God, betrayed, crucified and resurrected, overcame all the fears, all that is unlovable.

John so eloquently invites us, “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.....God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.”

God loves humanity unconditionally, and calls us to do the same, to live in love, not in fear. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, bringing exhilaration, confidence and grace. Amen.