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Do not be afraid to live out your calling

Zephaniah 1:7,12-end | Psalm 90:1-11 | 1 Thessalonians 5.1-11 | Matthew 25:14-30
15/11/2026 – 2nd Sunday before Advent

Prayer

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. (Cf. Psalm 19:14)

Humans in Fear

Dear friends in Christ,

Do not be afraid! - I am not talking about the length of my sermon, nor will I tell you a funny joke at the beginning today. But fear is an undeniably important topic in the Bible. I looked it up. Approximately 18 to 20 times Jesus uses the phrase “do not be afraid” in the four Gospels. And these are all key moments like the stilling of the storm or the raising of Jairus’ daughter from the dead. He also uses this phrase after His resurrection when He appeared to His disciples. Depending on the translation you use, you will find this phrase between 70 and 140 times in the Old Testament. It routinely appears in the context of a divine encounter, when people face battles, when they are called into the service of God, in times of grief or personal distress, or when facing economic hardship.

But why is this important? - Because the Bible serves as a mirror that reflects human life across thousands of years. And even if some of the historical contexts seem enormously different from ours, many people still find that these old texts speak directly to them. Fear is one of those fundamental human emotions we face and therefore at many points the Bible encourages us to leave fear behind us. We are encouraged to hope and to trust in God, and to look forward with optimism.

Those things that frightened people in biblical times are indeed still a reality today: wars, diseases, or poverty. Therefore, the Bible is fundamentally a library of hope that accompanies us to see the world from different perspectives.

When Fear Blocks Us

Sometimes we are so paralysed by our fears that we are unable to move or envision a path forward. Today's gospel illustrates such a situation. You heard the parable of the talents. In this story appears one servant who gives his master back his single talent with the words: "I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground." (Matthew 25:25)

Seeing all the other servants with a multitude of talents, the third servant may have suffered from a severe lack of self-esteem. The others multiplied their talents, they all doubled them. The third servant got only one talent. What should he do with the gift of his master? He seemed to be demotivated. Out of fear he didn't even try to steward his gifts. He was simply paralysed, incapable of channelling any creativity or energy. He decided to secure his talent and simply return it to the master.

To Jesus, it is quite clear that this is a serious failure. The one talent offers indeed a chance to enhance what he had received. But he wasted that limited potential.

Let me give an example from my profession as a job counsellor, which maybe explains what this could mean in the reality of today's world. Occasionally, clients say sentences like this: “It seems that nobody wants me. I am too old. I have nothing to offer anymore, and I am too expensive.” From time to time you hear other doubts like: “I would like to work, but there are no options.” These conversations often follow the same pattern: “I would love to, but...” It is a small game that the psychiatrist Eric Berne called the “Yes-But Game.” In fact, this is a No-Win Scenario.[1]

For clients who like to play this game, a job interview can evoke profound fear, because an interview is an unknown area. Because, after years of distance from the labour market, the known area of unemployment feels less frightening and it offers an illusion of stability. After

1 Berne, Eric: *Games People Play, The Psychology of Human Relationships,* Grove Press, 1964.

years of unemployment, it is sometimes a big step to break out, especially when people are stuck and disoriented.

Of course, there are serious reasons for the struggle of getting a job, like health issues, language issues or financial problems. These issues can paralyse a person additionally. Many people are trapped in circumstances that are predictable, yet deeply diminished. They are in a mixed situation of fear and unfortunate life circumstances, unable to move anywhere or unable to develop any new perspective for their lives.

Life is Short

Another helpful insight we can get iswhen having a look the work of Richard Rohr, a Roman Catholic Franciscan, and Andreas Ebert, a protestant theologian. They wrote a book at the end of the 1980s, entitled THE ENNEAGRAM[2]. The ENNEAGRAM is a typology designed to help people understand human behaviour. The foundational idea is that the personalities of people are in some way or another connected to the traditional deadly sins like pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, anger and sloth. A special thing about the ENNEAGRAM is that it recognises fear as a primary stumbling block. And I think there is a lot of truth in this idea. Fear is very serious, because it hinders us from fully embodying our lives and our calling. We miss the mark and we do not live as we were meant to or in accordance with God’s plan.

According to Rohr and Ebert people for whom fear is at the centre of their personality type, need places of security. We really need to understand that fear is a serious emotion that leads to dangerous developments, personally and within a society.

Accordingly, Psalm 90 reminds us that our days are brief and it prays for wisdom (Psalm 90:12). Life is indeed too short to be consumed by fear. We can't afford to waste our passing time. We must steward the gifts entrusted to us. Life in itself is unbelievably precious. Shaking off a life paralysed by fear is an important part of our Christian calling. This is why fear is a very serious issue.

2 Rohr, Richard / Ebert, Andreas: The Enneagram, A Christian Perspective, Crossroad Pub., 2019.

It is Already Finished

Christian faith leads us to the insight that there is no need to live perfect lives without mistakes. We are called to live with hope and trust in God. If we live in fear and despair, life can be very gray and dark. The letter of Paul to the Thessalonians (5:9-10) encourages us and confirms that God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through Jesus Christ. We are not destined to live in darkness but with Christ who is our light. Jesus lives with us, whether we are awake or asleep. God in Christ has already reconciled the world to Himself.

Through the incarnation, the cross and the resurrection God already showed His love to us. Jesus already paid the price to save us from the darkness of sin. We are loved and we are never alone in this world, which sometimes can be a quite dangerous place. But because of Christ there is no reason for fear.

That doesn't mean that there is no suffering in this world. That doesn't mean that there is no sin in this world. We still live in a world that needs healing, peace and justice. But God is with us even in the darkest places. In his incarnation he joined the reality of this world and sanctified his creation.

This is the deepest source of joy that helps us even to endure difficult situations. This truly divine joy can help us to overcome fear and to live out our lives and our calling. Because with God's love we are able to step forward every day and to make something out of our lives. Even if we only received one talent like the last servant in today's Gospel. In the economy of God every talent counts, even the smallest one. If fear leads our actions it is far worse than to make mistakes. The kingdom of God needs every gift that has been given to us.

Together on the Way

Finally, the same letter of Paul to the Thessalonians leaves us with a task as a community and as individuals. Because we know that God already saved and freed us, we should encourage others and build each other up. And in a congregation like Christ Church, there

are many ways to encourage each other. We do not need to be perfect or highly professional people. Every talent counts.

The traditional interpretation of today's Gospel points to the fact that in ancient times a talent was an unbelievably large amount of money (Actually the wage for half of a lifetime, approximately 15 to 20 years of work).[3] Which means that even the last servant was gifted richly by his master. And it is highly dangerous to waste this gift out of fear. Therefore the master calls the last servant a wicked and lazy slave (Matthew 25:26). These are harsh words for us today. Maybe the main problem addressed in this story is actually that the fear of the third servant produces a strange picture of a performance-driven God, which leads to a lack of self-esteem and creativity. The master in fact left nobody without a talent.

And even one talent is an enormous gift, whether we understand these talents as economical benefits or in a modern way as skills. And this gift is also meant to be used to build up the kingdom of God. God encourages us to use and develop our talents without fear.

Consequently, when we sit next to each other on a Sunday we encourage each other because we help each other to experience the community of Christ. When some of us do a reading they help us to hear God's word. When some of us help with the distribution of coffee after the service they help us to experience the hospitality and goodness of God. And many other ways of using our talents contribute to the building up of the Kingdom of God, in music, in liturgy, in charity, or in mission.

I pray that God may help us to count our days, to live our lives and to overcome our fears so we can develop our gifts, using our talents for the building up of His kingdom.

Maybe you have a gift or talent that others haven't recognised yet. Do not be afraid to express yourself. Maybe you have recognised a talent in others. Do not be afraid to tell them. Now is the time to do it because life is too short to waste time and we all have wonderful gifts because God has given us abundantly.

Maranatha – Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

3 R. T. France: *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT), Eerdmans, 2007.

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