

Synopsis of Sermon

Rich begins by sharing that we are in an age of overprotection due to fear. While the crime rate (including the crime rate towards children) has decreased over the past 30 years, the fear of violence has increased in our practices. Every generation has faced its own set of fears. In a recent book titled "What Should We Be Worried About?: Real Scenarios that Keep Scientists Up At Night", interviewed scientists list fears such as cyber-terrorism, social and economic chaos due to global warming, and the increasing automation of nuclear weapons. A recent article written by a 26 year old man outlined his shared fear of never marrying, not finding the dream career, or having to move back in with his parents.

This week, we are going to pay attention to the words that the angel spoke to Mary and Mary Magdalene regarding on the morning of Jesus' resurrection: "Do not fear!" from Matthew 28:1-10.

Among the things that we might find ourselves fearing is the truth behind the resurrection story of Jesus. Rich asserts that we may hesitate becoming Christians because we fear the story of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection may be nothing more than a fairytale. We fear being deluded. Certainly we can look at the lives of others who have followed something blindly, albeit with full devotion that resulted in disaster. Take the Heaven's Gate cult who committed mass suicide simply because they were convinced by the tragically false prophecy of Marshall Applewhite and Bonnie Nettles.

In order for us to understand the consequence of following Jesus, we must first realize that we are living towards something. A common theme in popular culture is that we live to be made complete by another person with whom we share a romantic relationship. The unfortunate reality behind this is that no human being, other than Jesus, can bear the burden of being God for us. Whether we recognize it or not we are choosing to believe something and we are living towards one end or another.

But why Christianity? Because we believe it is true. One piece of the gospel story that sets the story of Christ apart from all others is that the gospel hinges on the eyewitness of people who would make phenomenally weak witnesses at that time. Were the gospels fabricated, why would the authors choose to depend primarily on the initial eyewitness of two women, one of whom had been demon-possessed (x 6!)? We are additionally pointed towards the evidence of the empty tomb. Why, if not for it being the actual happening, would the gospel story hinge itself on something as verifiable as stone-covered-yet-empty tomb? The birth of the Church also points us to the reliability of the gospel. That many of Jesus' disciples devoted their lives and even suffered death due to their committed belief in the resurrected Son of God strongly supports the truth of their testimony.

In addition to the fear of delusion, we fear the changing of our minds. We hold onto the things we believe to be true, particularly the important things, very tightly. We prefer not to reevaluate or deeply question the foundational tenants by which we live our lives. But the gospel calls us to a radically different way of living that involves servitude over station, selflessness over selfishness, obedience over free will, and covenant over transaction. We are asked to enter into a constant process of transformational thinking, and this can cause fear. But the same devotion that caused the disciples who grew the early church and those that have continued its growth up to present day show us the incalculable worth of submitting to the transformation of our minds.

Finally, we fear death. For those without the hope of resurrection, death is something to be ignored as much as possible and avoided at all costs. But those who believe in the divinity and resurrection of Jesus believe the words in 1 Thessalonians 4:14: "... and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus

those who have fallen asleep in Him.” To many, death seems like the end, but on Easter Sunday, God had the last word. God raised Jesus from the grave and in doing so, defeated death, and so took away all of its power over us.

Getting the Conversation Started

These questions can be used as an ice-breakers in the beginning OR interwoven between the questions below to draw the group into the discussion.

Name someone or a group of people who you consider to be brave. Why?

What is something you would consider one of your biggest fears?

Scripture Study

Read: Luke 22: 28-34 and 54-62

28 “You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, 29 and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, 30 that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

31 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” 33 Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” 34 Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”

54 Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. 55 And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. 56 Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, “This man also was with him.” 57 But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” 58 And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” 59 And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” 60 But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” 62 And he went out and wept bitterly.

Getting things started: What sticks out to you about how Peter first responded to Jesus when He told Peter he would deny Jesus?

Observation/Interpretation vv31-32 What does Jesus tell Peter about Satan’s desire for him and what is Jesus’ desire for Peter? (Satan: that Peter would be would be “sifted like wheat”, or dissuaded from remaining a follower of Christ; Jesus: that Peter would use his experience of “turning back” as a testimony of redemption to strengthen others)

Observation vv. How does Peter respond to Jesus’ prediction that Peter would deny him?

Application In what ways do we convince ourselves of our own intestinal fortitude only to find ourselves disappointed when our efforts fail us? Are we caught in an endless loop of trial and failures or can we grow in our reliance on God without countless errors? (Perhaps this is a both/and situation where we can learn to trust in God and learn from our previous mistakes but also accept that part of

the human condition is that we sometimes do what we intend not to do and don't do what we intend to do).

Application How can God use the times we fail to do what we desire to do to encourage others?

Observation To whom did Peter deny knowing Jesus? vv.55-60

Interpretation What caused Peter to deny knowing Jesus to these people? Did he have reason to be afraid of them knowing that he knew Jesus? Why was he separating himself from Jesus? (Fear led him to deny; it is debatable whether or not he *should* have feared their recognition, but it is worth considering that they were convinced of his connection to Jesus and he adamantly denied anyhow)

Observation How did Peter react to hearing the rooster crow? vv.60-62

Interpretation What did Peter feel that led him to weep? How close to you believe Peter felt to Jesus at that moment? Do you think he remembered the words that Jesus had spoken to him about his restoration?

Application What are some things that fear can cause us to do that ultimately result in sin and separation from God? What things do we fear that we really should not fear given the power of God?

Application Often times when we sin, or deny our allegiance to Jesus in word or action, we feel far from God, though in reality He is always with us. Are there any practices or disciplines we can add to our lives to remind us that our relationship with God does not depend on our perfection, but rather on His perfect love for us?

Ministry Time:

1. Take some time to wait on God in silence. Ask if there is anyone in your group that finds themselves afraid. Break into groups and pray over those people, praying that God will begin to alleviate their fears, that He would comfort them, and that they would feel His strength and power.
2. Take some time to pray as a group for those who are in fear in the world today. Pray for those in the world who feel incredible distance from God because of guilt, perceived judgment, or simply unfamiliarity with God. Pray that others will experience comfort and will hear and believe the life-giving message of Jesus' victory over death.