

Rev. Jan Bihl - Sermon Synopsis for October 23, 2016
Micah 6: 6-8; Mark 12: 29-34a; I John 4: 17-18

The reading from I John makes a bold claim.
There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.

But which fear? Which love?

There are many things we could fear today. Cancer. Cyberwarfare. Crime. Financial meltdown. The election south of the border. I could go on.

Yet the statement Jesus uses so often is “Don’t be fearful. Don’t be afraid. Fear not.”

What we call fear and what we call love have many connotations in our vernacular.

Fear isn’t all bad. There are helpful fears. Legitimate in that they give us a warning message for protection or course-correction. Going whale watching? Wear a life jacket. Oncoming car in your lane? Get out of the way! Toxic relationship? Get out. Out of sync with God/with your true and best self? Get back on track. Alternatively, sometimes fear can be telling us we are actually on the *right* track, onto something life-changing for which we need to take a risk.

Fears that are not helpful are of a different sort.

Some fears fill us with panic and terror... leading to scarcity thinking and spiritual amnesia where we forget all the things that God has done and brought us through. In the article *Age of Fear*, author Neil Stauass questions why, in the safest time in human history, there is so much fear. He attributes much fear and anxiety – even personality changes – to hours of watching the news. Apparently for media and politicians, our fear is worth billions!

Whether from media or other sources, fear can have us bound up and hardly able to breathe.

Pay attention to what kind of fear is showing up. Is it helpful? Is it making you cringe and breeding more fear? Jesus claims that the truth will set us free.

Love, too, is a word that has a wide array of connotations. Much that passes for love is not love at all...not the love that is central to the Gospel.

Codependence can pass for love. Peace at any price can as well. Often actions appear to be loving but scratch the surface and it is a different thing altogether.

The love we hear in our readings today takes us in another direction altogether.

What does the Lord require of you? When the prophet Micah writes about doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with your God, I believe he is talking about love: love that requires something of us.

I John echoes this love. He is quite particular about what kind of love this is. You can't say you love God and hate your brother/sister. It's one or the other. *When we take up permanent residence in a life of love we live in God and God lives in us...and in this love there is no room for crippling fear.* (The Message)

Take time to inquire into what kind of love is showing up. Pseudo-love or the real thing. Pay attention to the real thing. Register it in some way; record it! Notice the sense of life and connection that brings. Don't take love for granted!

Take a moment now to reflect on the role of love and fear in your life.
Is there a love in you that you are lifting up as valuable and life-giving for you?
Is there a fear that you are giving to God?

What invitation is here?

Whatever it is, imagine Jesu beside you, placing his hand gently on your shoulder, and, as he did of old, speaking the words he alone can speak in its deepest sense:

"Fear not. Don't be afraid. I am with you."

Amen.