

One day a farmer saw that a great storm was approaching. So he gathered up all his livestock and secured them. He boarded up his windows and tied down everything that was loose. Then he saw a small flock of pigeons that always seemed to be around his farm. He figured that they too were in danger from the storm and so he decided to try and get them into the barn. But every time he came near them to try to lead them to safety, he only scared them and they scattered and flew away. He thought, “If only I could become one of them, knowing what I know, I could save them.”]

In Jesus God became one of us to save us without scaring us away; Jesus takes it a step further – he dies for our sins to save us

the command, “do not be afraid” is repeated twice in today’s Gospel, with a command to “fear no one” for starters

Jesus does not want us to be afraid in life – he commands us not to be

distinction between *being* afraid and *feeling* afraid

courage does not mean that you feel no fear at all; it means trusting despite your fears, acting anyway; a hero is not one who feels no fear, but who acts heroically despite his fears

a soldier going into battle; a fireman going into a burning building

[opening scene in the movie *Saving Private Ryan* shows soldiers about to storm the beach at Normandy on D-Day *very afraid*, unlike other war movies] – reality shows: we want to see things as they truly are or were; Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* is another example

a sense of fear can be a good thing; it can protect us from harm or injury

young children can learn to swim because they don't yet know what can hurt them

fear keeps us from acting foolishly – like walking into oncoming traffic

[story of Natalie and the button]

being afraid as a life orientation, a fear that controls you, prevents you from living as God intended, keeps you from growing, keeps you from loving

some fears are natural – there's much to feel afraid about: sickness, injury, loss of possessions, health, job, loved ones, loss of life itself, being a victim of crime, terrorism, war

But what is the “root” fear?

Do this thought experiment: you could have anything you wanted, you could live forever, you would never be sick or injured, you could do anything, nothing would be forbidden. But there is one catch: you could never see God or be in his presence

that is the ultimate fear: separation from God

being afraid, orienting your life around fear is living as though you expect to lose God

Jesus tells us not to be afraid because losing God cannot happen

God and humanity are united in Christ Jesus: a bond that cannot be broken

to be afraid is not to trust in Christ, to reject the hope that such a bond could be, to seek security in other things that we know we're going to lose anyway: possessions, career, loved ones

Jesus commands us not to do that; but he does say “fear him who could destroy body and soul”

*if you had anything to fear it would be God, not the world*

it's natural to fear death in the sense that we fear the act of dying

one comedian said, “I don't mind dying – I just don't want to be there when it happens”

We matter to God – we are of more value than many sparrows

the illustration of the hairs on our heads all being counted means God is closer to us than we know, and He has even the tiniest details about us in mind and under His control

God values us far, far more than we know or realize

It is as if God is saying to us: "*I've got your back*"

So don't be afraid out in the world

Always keep in mind these basic truths: He is God almighty, nothing can overcome Him or prevent Him; He loves us; He knows us intimately; He cares for us; He became one of us to save us; When two or three are gathered together in his name, He is present; When we believe in Him and trust in Him He lives within our hearts

How can we be afraid?

Do not be afraid – you are of more value to God than you think, and He's got your back