



Fear Not Staying

by Pastor Doug Lutz

They caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break... and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man! ... Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people."—Luke 5:6b, 7b, 8, 10b)

Phobos. That's the Greek word for "fear" or "panic" or "flight". It's where we get the familiar word "phobia" which is used to describe a myriad of anxiety disorders. Although its intensity is slightly different from terror or horror, it conveys the common kind of fear we experience in day-to-day living. Its use is so common, in fact, that there are no less than 549 documented phobias in the world, like "glossophobia" (the fear of public speaking) or "*zoophobia*" (the fear of animals). So, if you're afraid of something it has probably been named. If not, just add the word *phobia* to the end of the fear you are experiencing and voila... you can have your very own, personalized anxiety disorder!

I know as a boy the last thing I wanted to be called was a "scardy cat". Who would? But if we're honest, most of us are scared of something. Maybe not on the surface, but given the right set of circumstances it doesn't take long for fear to wrap itself around your chest and tighten its grip.

So what should we do with Jesus' words, "do not be afraid" or "fear not" when we hear them? Should we simply take our lumps and do the walk of shame for yet another failure to meet the Master's expectations? Or, perhaps we could get mad and shake a fist in His face for not understanding how bad things really are. Whatever the initial reaction, Jesus is *not* saying that we "should not *have* fear". That would be like saying you shouldn't have freckles or morning

breath. No. His words are a present, continuous command: “STOP being afraid.” Or, better still, “STOP scaring yourself.” That is to say, once fear shows up, don’t allow fearful emotions to continue to cloud your thinking and motives and actions.

This is exactly what Jesus was trying to tell Simon-Peter after Peter told Jesus to get lost at the end of a successful fishing trip. Some might say that Jesus was telling Peter to “get a grip” or “stop being stupid”. I don’t think so. Jesus invites Peter to come with Him instead of pushing away. It’s not that Peter was ungrateful for the largest catch he’d ever seen. He was overwhelmed. Jesus did something for Peter that only God could do; and that scared him.

So, what scares you? Is it God? Maybe it’s the idea of surrendering things you want to control but know you can’t? If you asked me, it could be anything or nothing. But one thing is sure: I’d rather learn to be the master of my fears than remain a slave to them. And since they’re not going away anytime soon, I choose not to send Jesus away; a choice I believe Peter was glad he made.

Fear not staying...

Prayer resolve: Today I choose to follow Jesus ... again. Lord, Help me.

Hungry for Life!

Things I'm Thinking About

Here is what I am hearing, learning and thinking about as we move through our current crisis into a re-calibrated future and beyond. Although we don’t know for sure when we can meet again face-to-face, we need to prepare ourselves now for what might be different later. So here is this week's thought I want to put forward for consideration and prayer.

When Should We Re-Open?

While restrictions are being lifted in many areas, a recent poll last week taken by Gloo has shown that 25-30% of people aren’t sure how to respond to businesses and churches reopening. To assume that people are going to rush back to their favorite restaurants or slide frantically back into their familiar pew at church just because they can, is a bit naïve. And before we make any judgments, this isn’t necessarily a faith vs. fear issue. It simply points out how confusing sheltering-in and social distancing has affected us during the COVID-19 pandemic.

FOUR OBSERVATIONS: So what should people do? Depending on where you are located,

here are 4 observations I am thinking about as we consider coming back together:

Make sure you are up to date on current guidelines. Check frequently with the local health professionals in your area. For me that would be listening to the advice of our BC Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry. We care for ourselves and others well when we listen to reasonable people giving reasonable advice in unreasonable times.

Just because we can, should we? Although Dr. Henry has indicated that churches can meet in groups of 50 or less after May long weekend (this number will vary based on being properly distanced at 6 feet apart), there are varied precautions prescribed based on the population being served. For example, tighter precautions should be observed where attenders over 60 years old and folks with health issues are concerned. Since this is the case in our particular congregation, I am advising that we wait a while longer before commencing indoor meetings of any kind (at least until we reach phase three or possibly phase four).

To love our neighbor as ourselves is both a moral and social mandate. In the words of my good friend Ray Griffiths, "I'd rather be a coward and live than a hero and die." While we don't want to be fearful, we also don't want to be irresponsible. Instead we should choose to consider others above ourselves (Philippians 2:3).

Make sure you weigh your "why" before moving forward too fast. We all want to see each other and get back to a "normal" Sunday routine. The question we should be asking here is *why*... why is this important to me? Does church attendance make me feel more spiritual, more connected to God? Am I afraid if this digital church stuff lasts too long we will lose something valuable? Am I concerned that things just won't be the same or that others might lose interest in the church? Do I think this is a bunch of hogwash in the first place? Whatever reasons we have for wanting to be together sooner than later, let's be careful not to over-spiritualize our response or get frustrated with those who don't see things the same way. God isn't going anywhere. Neither is His church.

Remember our mission. Friends, our foremost concern spiritually speaking is to love God with our whole being which includes worship, prayer and sold-out passion for his glory while bringing as many people as possible along for the ride. This is our discipleship mandate! As we have seen and experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, this can be done anywhere and everywhere using technology now and even after we gather in our physical spaces. While many of us would like to physically gather even if only in small groups, our worship of God includes responsibility to our neighbor. As with all pandemics of the past, this too shall pass. We will all gather face-to-face sooner than later. Until then, let's remember to pray for our leaders who like us are feeling their way through this. And pray also for all the new online folks who are warming

to the thought of darkening the doors of the church; all because we were faithful to seek new ways to reach our neighbor with the love of Jesus.

*For an excellent article on COVID-19 "When the Church Reopens, Here's How to Meet Safely", from Christianity Today, [Click here.](#)

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Data Resource: *Gloo research

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