Fear Not!

Bishop Curry, our new Presiding Bishop, has invited us to live without fear. With acts of terror on the rise, he has invited us to "fear not." I was glad when he put forward this message because we are a people who are called to be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves." Innocence allows us to be a people who live by faith not by fear. Wisdom invites us to look deeply into the human condition recognizing its pervasive sinfulness while also seeking, by God’s grace, to be free of its grasp.

Jesus is a perfect example to us of a person who lived in a time of terror. We remember that his nation was an occupied country during his lifetime. The Holy Land had been overcome and was ruled by Rome, and Jesus was constantly aware of the oppressive powers that surrounded him; these occupiers must have had a shaping experience upon our Lord. On one hand he was exposed to the potentially overwhelming fear of the terror of Roman occupation, a fear that could have kept him silent, particularly with regard to his own Majesty. On the other hand, even among his own people, there existed a kind of terror, a religious terror that demanded conformity and sought to protect the existing power structure, a structure designed to invite religiosity rather than an authentic relationship with the living God.

Jesus was as wise as a serpent and as innocent as a dove and we are called to be like him. I believe we see his innocence in his relationship with his heavenly Father. His innocence is displayed by his willingness to travel the road less traveled. He wanders to the Jordan River where he experiences the baptism of John and the touch of God. From there with faith and without fear he goes into the wilderness and is tempted. He overcomes the several temptations by relying upon the strength of the divine. With faith and without fear, he ventures forth in ministry proclaiming the possibility of a deep and authentic relationship with his Father in heaven, a relationship that he displays throughout his life. With innocence in the garden of Gethsemane, he receives and accepts the agony that is necessary for humanity’s release from the grasp of sin and death.

His wisdom is displayed in his relationships not only with his disciples but with the religious and political leaders of his day. He challenges the religious authority by inviting them to self-examination and he challenges the political leaders by questioning the source of their power and authority. He challenges and invites his disciples over and over again to look beyond what they already know and to begin to see the divine in their midst. The wisdom that he offers in these relationships is a wisdom designed to invite the individual and institution to humility, knowing the order of the universe, all authority, in fact everything, is subject to God.

So how does this relate to you and me? As disciples of Jesus we are to recognize and join in our Lord’s innocence and wisdom. Innocence allows us to live with faith and without fear every second, every minute, every hour, and every day because we are not only subject to God but magnificently loved by God. Wisdom invites us into honest relationships guided by the advocate, the encourager, the still small voice, the Holy Spirit.

There is a force greater than terror and fear. God’s love is greater! Thanks be to God!

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