

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
Exodus 32:7-14  
November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013

You perhaps recall the story Jesus told in the Gospels about a master who had three servants. Before the master left on a long journey, he gave one of his servants five talents, another two talents, and the third one talent. Two of the servants invested the money and the return came back two-fold. The third servant dug a hole and buried it for safekeeping. When the master returned, he complimented the two servants who wisely invested the money. However, he had harsh words for the servant who did nothing. The servant explained his failure by saying, "I was afraid."

One of our most crippling fears is the fear of failure. There are "natural" fears, of course: heights, falling, loud noises, the dark, losing our earthly possessions, or talking to our boss.

The words of our Lord, "*Do not be afraid*" ironically appear 365 times in the Bible. That's once for each day of the year. There is no day in our life when fear of some kind, of some degree, is not with us. And with that fear, all the time, our Jesus is on our side. When life is dark and fearful, we need our Lord to turn to. We are human, and so we have feelings. Our emotions are important and useful unless they get out of control; then we are in trouble.

Each one of us can quickly recall our own fears. We all have something in our life that is trying to defeat us. It may be a person with whom we work, our health, a problem child, or even a struggle with our spouse. We can easily surrender to these things and give up – throw in the towel – or we can seek help, work at working things out, get up and get going and face our fears.

When Moses returned from talking with God on the mountain, he walked into a big problem. The devil had been having a field day during his absence. Perhaps it was fear that corrupted the people and moved them to fashion a false idol made of gold. They wanted a god who was with them, a god they could see. The Lord was too long coming down that mountain. Trust that God would provide waned.

Beloved, as we wait on God, it's easy to realize our deepest fears. And what fear has us do, what causes us the most damage, is that fear has us to forget. Israel forgot the promises of God and thought that God had abandoned them in the desert. We, too, forget when sufferings abound and God's mercy seems so far away.

It's easy to forget the mercy of God. When Moses was on top of the mountain for 40 days, the people lost confidence in him and in God. They wanted a god that would be with them (as if He was ever really absent). "Make us gods, Aaron," they said. "We don't know what happened to Moses and God. We fear the worst. We can't live any longer without our gods with us."

They forgot how God had delivered them from Egypt. They forgot how the Lord parted the water so they could cross the Red Sea. They forgot how God had provided manna to feed them and water to quench their thirst as they made their way to Mount Sinai. They forgot how God said to them, "*You are my people, and I am your God.*" They forgot they made this promise: "*We will do everything the Lord has said.*" In the midst of all of their fears, they forgot.

Much like the children of Israel, we make our promises in our lifetime. We make promises to pay bills – even to take out the garbage or clean our room. We make promises to our children and our spouses in marriage. And with all that, there is the promise that we make with God in response to what He has done for us in Jesus. Parents and sponsors, you recall the promise you made for your children, and God-children... that you would pray for them, bring them the Lord's House and teach them the faith of the Scriptures. You recall your promise at your confirmation... to receive the Lord's Supper

regularly and to be faithful even unto death. These are our promises. We easily forget what God has done for us, the promises He has made and the promises we have made to Him. Satan locks in on our own fears and leads us to believe that God has forgotten about us. We rush into our own idolatry, find other gods of comfort – quick-fix type of comforts – God is too long in answering my prayers so I will look to other types of comforts. Satan and the world lies to us and we listen to their lies. We are caught believing that our problems and sufferings can be resolved by creating a solution to our problem – by making other gods of comfort and desire – that take the place of our Lord.

Beloved, we are called to remember our Lord and His promises. It's interesting that Moses reminded God of that very same thing when His anger burned against His own people. Moses said, *"Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven... I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever. And the Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people."*

Our call to God is that of Moses... lest we forget that the Lord has mercy and promises such for us. Should our enemies be victorious against us? Should sin and death win the day? No! God does not need to be reminded of His promises. We call out to God so that we may be reminded what He has promised... *"I will be your God and you will be my people."* God reminds us of His unending mercy and how much we need that mercy every day.

Where are you reminded of that great mercy? In His Word, of course. At His House, of course. In His Supper of life and forgiveness, of course. And it's not something that we just call to mind – a reminder – lest we forget. It's an act of mercy that our Lord gives to us. He brings it right from heaven into your life. He gifts you with an undeserved mercy that flows from the wounds of our Savior Jesus.

We have just one more week after today before our "Happy New Year" on the church calendar will begin with the first Sunday in Advent. It's hard to imagine that 2013 is winding down already. In these last days of the Church-year, we begin to focus on the promise of Jesus to come again on the last day. It's probably true that you don't think of that particular promise very much as a Christian. You think of the great things that Jesus said, what He has done – and that is all well and good. But do you often think of Jesus' promised return? Now that I mentioned it, we might think, "It has been a long time since He made that promise – 2000 years since He talked about such things as in the Gospel text." Has Jesus forgot? No.

Have we been waiting so long we have created our own gods to follow and to mimic? This is the danger of the sinners mind. God is distant, we might think. He is too far removed. But this is not true. He comes to you today and meets you where you are at – wherever that might be. "Do not be afraid". The unknown is what scares us. We don't know what the doctor is going to say about the stress test I performed. How is my blood work results going to come back? There is enough in life to fear. But not with our Lord. He is not a long time in coming. He comes and will come. He comes to you at just the right time. He came already to do the work of salvation for you on the cross. His will is perfect and He works on His time. Be not afraid, beloved. Our Lord is still Lord. Here is where we meet Him and, more importantly, He meets us and gives us everything we need for our day, our week... our eternal life. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.