

2nd July 2020

Fear

**“Let me assert my firm belief,
that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”**

F D Roosevelt, from his first inaugural speech as president of the USA, 1933

The Christian message is clear: “Love your neighbour as yourself”. Living in loving relationships is fundamental. Why, then, do we find that carrying out this command – for command it must be – is not a simple thing? I believe that the difficulties we have in loving are based on fear.

Love, fully expressed, requires a “letting go” of self. It exposes the giver of love to an examination of who they are. It questions the inward-looking part of our nature, ingrained attitudes, and the innate and selfish desire to see ourselves as central to the whole scheme of things. We fear that loving completely will take us into an uncharted world outside our self-created experiences. We are afraid to give ourselves to “the other”.

Jean Vanier, founder of the *L'Arche* communities (where people with and without learning disabilities build community together as responsible adults), wrote *Be Not Afraid* in 1976. In it he explores how fear can have a stranglehold on the good intentions of many Christians, and how it undermines ordinary human relationships. We need, Vanier suggests, to be clear about our personal identity, and to see it is not diminished, but, instead, grows into wholeness, when we get over our fear of fully loving one another. Loving as we are commanded to carries with it risks: of “not knowing”; personal change; challenge to self-awareness; growth. Because we are unwilling to face these risks out of a fear what we will become, we are afraid of truly meeting one another and giving our all to love.

St John, in his first letter (4:13) writes:

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear.

So, let's live in *that* belief, and know that the selflessness of love offers freedom, wonder and fullness of life beyond our limited imagining.

A prayer for today

Living God, your selfless love is poured out for us. Help us to give ourselves fully to loving one another, that we might know life in all the fullness you promise. Amen

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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