

1st Sun. aft. Christmas
Psalm 111
December 29, 2024

You have all heard the first part of the last verse of the Psalm for today: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. . .” When you hear these words, fear of the Lord, what comes to mind? Many would wonder why we should fear the God who loved us so much that He came from heaven above to become one of His creation, the creation that went against Him, decided they knew better than Him. In spite of that, He, the Triune God decided what was created was worth saving and promised a future salvation through a virgin who would take care of the serpent, satan, even though it would bring about death to the Son, which we know was only a three day stay in that tomb.

Fear the Lord. We pray, “Our Father who art in heaven”. Father, fear, do the two even go together with God? If we think about it, yes, they do. When you were growing up, what went through your mind when you had done wrong, especially when you went against the explicit direction of your father? What awaited you when you were found out? Some, it might have been a switch. Others it may have been a belt or strap. For us it was the hand of my Dad who had hands that would make mine look small. He took to heart *Proverbs 13:24: Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him, or to discipline him early as some have it.*

Why would the rod be appropriate for discipline. We think it may be a little harsh but something is needed to get the attention of the son so that what needs to be brought home it thought about and obeyed so that the child will grow up to respect their elders and to know right from wrong. When the child learns that what they have done or not done displeases the one they love, the chances of doing or not doing it again should be greater or less and the breaking of the command may never even happen again.

If there is that love between the child and the father then any breaking of the rules, the law, will end in the child thinking before they act so that the bond between them will not be strained or broken. Is it fear? Fear, not only of what the consequences are when a law or rule is broken but fear that the relationship they have will be diminished, not what it used to be.

We go back to the garden. We have recorded that Adam and Eve tried to hide behind those fig leaves. They knew they had done wrong and yes, they feared God that

He had every right to kill them for what they did. We don't have them pleading for their lives even though they sought to put the blame on someone else. We don't know what went on in their minds. Did they understand the perfect relationship was ruined for their whole lives? We don't know but we can imagine each day was different than it once was. They had to feel it, to yearn for that relationship to return but it was forever lost for them, at least until they entered heaven.

We see the Psalm for today ends with the fear of the Lord but what did the Psalmist write before this last verse? It begins with praising the Lord with his whole heart pointing to the congregation who has all sorts of positive thoughts of what the Lord has done and continues to do. Yes, it even talks of those He is doing for, who are the ones who fear the Lord.

We know the text from Matthew: *Matthew 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.* This is an interesting text for those who trust in Jesus for their lives as Paul wrote what would seem is the opposite in his letter to the Romans: *Romans 8:1-2 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.*

We are to fear the one who can destroy both body and soul and yet the next thought is that Christ negates that fear with no condemnation. Jesus has set us free from the law of sin which in another passages says that sin is wages, what we earn. Yes, we earn wages for sin which in the end is death but Jesus has earned for us life as He collected all the wages of our sin and rose from the grave to be the first to do so, so that we could have eternal life through Him.

We are to fear the Lord and yet we know we should fear for He with one word could kill us and yet when we think of the fear of the Lord, could there be some other nuance to the word "fear" as we are to understand it from the Hebrew? Is there another definition?

If you turn in your Lutheran Study Bible to page 1001, you will find a discussion of the Fear of the Lord. It points out that the word fear in the Hebrew can mean the fear we have been talking about as Jacob feared for his life as Esau was out to kill his brother because not only had he took his birthright for a bowl of soup but had tricked Dad into giving Jacob his blessing. No wonder that fear continued for all those years that Jacob was up North working for His wives and children. It is interesting that Jacob

still had the fear of his brother as he came back to the promised land only to find out that Esau had long since let his anger subside as the Lord blessed him so much while Jacob was gone that any loss he may have felt after those two misdeeds was an ancient memory.

The page about the fear of the Lord in the LSB points out this “fear” of the Lord but it also points out that the word can also have other shades of meaning. When referring to fear with respect to a person in high position, it takes on the idea of standing in awe or reverence before that individual. It points out that this is the kind of fear God wants us to have of Him.

Knowing who God is and that He cares for those who “fear” Him we can sit back in awe of Him and what He has done and continues to do for us. Yes, we know we sin and deserve His wrath but we also know and trust that Jesus took that wrath upon Himself on the cross and paid the price, received the wages for our sin. He died so that in His rising, we too will die and yet our rising from the grave is sure for He rose so that we too would rise to be with Him forever.

You know you should have a wholesome fear of the Lord for He is perfect and can't stand being with the imperfect. You know you are imperfect but you are clothed with the blood of the perfect, Jesus.

I have been reading a book written by Rev. Bryan Wolfmueller titled: “*A martyrs faith in a faithless world.*” In it he points to fear and a fear that we all have as it goes against what we were made for in the beginning and that still seeks to rule our lives, our lives which were meant to last forever.

There is that fear of death we all have. Oh, we know the outcome for us who believe, we will be with Jesus but there is that act of dying that strikes fear. Rev. Wolfmueller points out the scripture that says the devil has been conquered by Jesus but we don't see it in our world. It seems that sin and evil is winning. Daily, we hear of evil that is committed by various humans. We see how the devil has lied to them about who they are and what they are to be about. They trust the lie instead of the truth which is found in the one who is truth in the flesh, Jesus.

Hebrews 2:14-15 states: *14-5 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.* We look at this passage and we

wonder how the devil could have the power of death, of murder. We would say that is wrong and the only God has the power of life and death but Rev. Wolfmueller points out that the death the devil has the power of are the little deaths, you know the ones you have to deal with, the fear of death that enslaves us. You know some of those like Lie or you will lose your job. Cheat or you will lose your grade. Say nothing or lose your friendship. Change your conviction or you will lose your status. He writes, Whatever it is—the fear of death, the fear of loss, the fear of shame—fear is sitting behind the devil's threat.

The devil wants you to fear his lies. God wants you to fear Him and only Him. No matter what you are going through with the devil wanting you to fear him and what he can do to trick you into thinking, you are to fear the Lord.

We think of Job and what he went through. Think of all he went through at the hands of the devil. He lost his family, all except his wife. He lost all of his wealth. He lost, it would seem all the respect he had from those who lived around him, including his friends, yet who did Job fear more?

Here is what he said that we might have heard at a funeral or at a graveside or at least in the movies. Here is what Job said: *Job 1:21b* “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Who did Job fear? He knew the one thing, the one person he had awe and reverence for and that was God. What did he know that we know? He knew who created all that has been created. He speaks of different parts of creation from constellations to animals and how each had their place in creation. He knew who formed it all and who was to say that the Lord couldn't do it all again if He wanted?

We know that all that Job had was restored even if it may not be that way with us or others and yet as we fear the Lord, He knows what will be “best” for us even if it might mean our deaths for our faith in Jesus who has given us that faith.

We are to fear the Lord, for in it, we find the beginning of wisdom, the right use of knowledge we have from the Lord in His Word. We are to have that fear, that awe and reverence we have for the one who has our lives in His hands. He has the power to take our lives but because of His love for us in Jesus we have been promised life. Let that thought take us through each day as the devil tries to pry us away from the Lord through fear that has been conquered by the perfect love of the Lord, in Jesus.