

## 2023 Trinity Sunday

All through Luther's small catechism section on the ten commandments is the repeated saying, "We should fear, love, and trust in God..."

And as I thought about this sermon for Trinity Sunday I couldn't help but ponder that "fear and love" part. It's there in the scriptures. They are full of admonitions toward the fear of the Lord and, at the same time, Loving the Lord our God.

Because, I think, if there is a God, a maker, and redeemer of the Universe. That should fill us, simultaneously, with astounding fright, not just respect, I mean terror. Yet, at the same time, such joy that it cannot be contained.

And you might say those are contradictory feelings but I don't think they are. The adrenaline junkie never feels more alive than when they are on the blade's edge of life and death. And maybe we, if we are to look up from our screens might catch the stars on a dark night and be filled with transcendent fear and awe, yet at the same time, beauty and joy. Fear and love.

Now, this is not to say that safety, the opposite of fear, is not something we don't want, or covet, even to our harm. Likewise let us not pretend we are immune to sabotaging our happiness for one reason or another - for sympathy, for attention, or some other cognitive dissonance. In fact, have you ever met someone who you

can't help but wonder if they don't just WANT to be unhappy and miserable? Is that ever us at times?

Because the reality is we often desire to fear and love things other than God. And the "love" temptation is easy for us to get, I think. We love and desire money, security, ourselves, popularity, and sexuality. Yet why should we love such things more than God, all those things we love so much cannot save. Should we not reserve our love for things that love in return, or I daresay, loved us first?

The "fear" temptation is a little trickier to understand I think. Yet we do fear other things don't we? we fear silly little things like cancer, and war, and starvation, and dying a slow, cold, lonely death. But why should we fear things other than God? Are they mightier than him? Are their threats as lasting, as strong, as sure? There are many scary things out there, but death, and war, and pain all go scurrying and hiding when God comes around. He's scarier.

And even in this conversation we have brushed up against one of the reasons we know there is a God. Because these things we fear and love all exist. It's all right here. Yet none of them are essential, and all of them fade. How can you be God? You die, and things continue to exist. You are not the essential existence. Nor is anything else we trust in, even the universe itself! It is clear it had a beginning and very well might have an end – even the secular world agrees as things spin on

towards entropy. Which again proves the point: if the universe is eternal as some foolishly wish to say 1. It doesn't answer "the beginning" question, and 2. Why isn't it all uniform space dust yet?

But no, we look up and we see cosmic powers that we cannot even compute.

Distances so vast, planets so large, forces so strong not even light can escape and time itself wrinkles. We can take a measly, tiny, spec of a star – our sun, and you, creature who is so afraid of such little things, and thinks so much of the things you love – and look at that sun for two minutes. It will burn your eyes out.

There is one who made that star. Which means he is greater than it. And we don't have any fear to spare for him? Things of enormous power are right to be feared.

Or do you site-workers think they will let me stroll around the nuclear reactor without clearance or protective gear? Yet, again, when it comes to the maker of those elements we think: "Oh yes, I'll give him a passing thought between screens, or on sundays, and just as long as his teaching don't make me a social outcast."

We think: "Oh yes, I know he likes me because I give 10% to charity. I'm a pretty good person – I don't bear any grudges except against people who really deserve it." Really? You will waltz into his presence with that? He has seen the greatest kings of the earth and he has slain them. He has seen the formation of galaxies, and wrought them with his hand. Each molecule in the spring that comes up into life,

he crafts and upholds. Each doe, each baby bird, each wolf and hawk that kills them. 1 Samuel 2:6 Hannah's prayer: Our God kills and makes alive.

And so to quote Aragorn from the Lord of the Rings: "Are you frightened? Not nearly frightened enough." And we Christians, who should know, better expect to waltz into his presence like it's an afternoon barbeque. And we Christians, who should know better, again, spend our fear on finances, we spend our worry on medical needs, we spend our fear on work stress. We spend our fear on a little thing, which our mighty God has overcome already – death. No! There is one who rightly deserves that fear, and you rob him of it, by spending it elsewhere. By letting those things control us instead of Him. We should fear God above all things. Because he is stronger than all things.

Yes, The existence of God should terrify us human gasbags and worms. How could we ever approach him? How could we get to him? How could we, on Trinity Sunday, expect to be able to wrap our heads around him. We confess he's three in one, not because it makes sense to us, but because that is who he has shown himself to be! We can't even figure out if coffee is good for us or not, we expect to understand the eternal and omnipotent God? He is stronger, he is more powerful than we could imagine. And therefore, if he isn't on your team, he is scarier than anything we could imagine.

Now. None of those questions or thoughts seem especially joyful do they? So in what sense can we fear AND LOVE God? Well the joy I think begins to come out when we acknowledge that since there is a God however vast and cosmic he might be, that means there is actually some meaning to the universe and to us bags of molecules on the edge of it. There is at least something, someone that is permanent, even if not us, that our lives somehow in a small or large way intersect with. And not only with him but also each other, who in turn intersect with God and others. So there is something lasting here. More than memory. Something in actuality, there is a God of the universe and you are in his universe and are, to use a very poor illustration, a player in the game that influences it in small and big ways. And if you think “not me, I don’t influence it at all,” well that’s just wrong. You’re here aren’t you? Some of us have lineages. And all of us impact the lives of those around us in ways that we couldn’t possibly compute. Even if it’s, taking up a spot at a traffic light that in turn slows someone’s commute that changes something in some way we can never know. There is joy, I think, in meaning. And because someone or something has called you into existence, therefore you, very much, matter.

There is joy also in the fact that since God is so cosmic and outside of time, well then, is it possible he has the cosmic power to undo death? And for you? That is certainly the claim of the resurrection, no? It is certainly due his name as the one to

be feared more than death. What you fear controls you, and if you let death control you, why is it your master and not God? Repent, serve him. Even unto death and you just may find he can set you free from it. Polycarp, an early Christian was threatened with being burned at the stake and he laughed at the Roman proconsul, “Why should I fear fire that burns for hours over the fire that burns much longer?” He feared God more than the Romans. And so he died, joyfully trusting in His God who would give him everlasting life.

And so the God who kills, the God of fear, is now the very same God of life, who is someone to be loved.

Because as I already mentioned, he doesn’t have to care about us varmints on this rock. There is no way we could reach him, threaten him. I mean, I can’t get my old friend from high school to call me back, that’s how much people care about us, why would the maker of the stars give a rip?

And I don’t have a good answer as to why he does. But, he does, doesn’t he?

God has made you. You, specifically. He didn’t have to. Any number of things could have kept you from existing, but here you are. Why? Because he wanted you here. And, because we are incapable of getting to him, or knowing him, he has

come to us. In power, yes, but also in great love and mercy. To reveal his desire to us that all would come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved.

He comes with a promise that you are the apple of his eye (Zechariah 2), you are engraved on the palms of his hands (Isaiah 49). You are so precious he would come to us, not in wrath or terror and armies. But as a child, not to scare us. With his messengers that proclaim, “do not be afraid.” And his mighty power he would hold back as the eternal omnipotent God gets hungry, thirsts, get’s tired, suffers pain and dies. The author of creation dies. And he dies for us, that you might be his forever. Undeserved, unearned, but steadfast, promised, sacrificial love. For you.

And in Jesus we see our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, has used his power, and continues to do so for good. For your Good. Romans 8:28. Being strong and powerful is one thing, and God certainly is that, fearfully strong. But those who use their strength to oppress, that’s what we call a bully. A monster. An abuser. But what of the strong who use their power to save? And God even moreso, he sets his power and might aside, for your good, to save you, to make you his own. So that when you see him, not because you waltzed into his presence, but because on your knees you have received the blood of Jesus to wash you clean, you will not meet a bully who will chastise you for each mistake and to condescend over you. You will meet a fearfully powerful, but Oh so gracious God who will say to you, “do not be

afraid.” Yes, only with the blood of Jesus can you truly not need to fear God. He then, with Jesus work, is your Father, ally, and redeemer. He has promised it.

And he has given us every reason to trust that promise. He gave his own Son. That we might be saved from the brokenness of this evil and fallen universe and brought safely to his side and kingdom where he will make all things new. That there is a God I can love. Even as he has first, undeservedly, loved me. And you.