

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## *Fear is the Path to the Dark Side*

## Epistle Lesson

1 John 4:16b-21 (NRSVUE)

<sup>16</sup> So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. <sup>17</sup> Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> Those who say, "I love God," and hate a brother or sister are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup> The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

## Bible/Sermon Focus

"Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate a [sibling] are liars."

That's an extremely strong sentiment coming from the first letter of John from today's scripture. It is also one of my favorite verses. It comforts me AND convicts me in times of trial or conflict. As Christians, and as people, we understand in-fighting. We see churches that tell the world that only their interpretation of Christianity is correct and that if we don't believe like them, we will be cast into an eternal lake of fire. We hear fellow Christians talk about "those people." If only "those people" would get a job. If only "those people" would give up their sinful lifestyle. If only "those people" wouldn't have babies so young.

Fear of the *other* is such an interesting concept because it almost always means that we simply haven't taken the time to get to know the *other*. Humanizing one another and finding common ground aren't that hard, you just have to be willing to take a few steps toward that person, to take a path into relationship with them, and find a connection. And when we do, we usually find it easier to love and respect our fellow siblings in Christ, and fellow siblings in the human family, and fellow siblings in creation. We can choose that path.

But if we follow the other path, the path of dis-connection, we end up fearing and disregarding what we don't know. As Master Yoda said, "Fear is the path to the dark side."

As Pastor Jim pointed out this week, fear isn't inherently bad. A healthy fear is good for us. Fear is a good motivator, to step back from a poisonous snake, or an abusive relationship, or from a bad habit. But it's when we let fear take over our rational minds, or use it as an excuse to exclude that which (or those whom) we don't know, then we are choosing fearful ignorance over love.

***Our God is an all-loving God.*** To which we respond, "Whew! Thank goodness!" Because we all struggle and fail at being all-loving, all the time. We need to keep this axiom at the core of our being and at the center of how we move through the world. When we are unable to love, or

when we are overtaken by fear and have lost our true north, we can always turn back to that axiom.

Like our scripture said, "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." Abiding in love is where we want to be. It's not that we won't slip from there. Of course this isn't easy, and as humans we must give ourselves grace for being the creatures we have been created to be (i.e. far from perfect). But when we slip, and we begin down that road, that fearful path, as soon as we recognize it, it's time to pause, and repent. The Hebrew word for repent is *shuv*. *Shuv* (repent) means to take a 180 degree turn. It means literally to turn around and walk back the other direction. And for me it's often the same scripture that indicts me enough to look down at my sneakers, give them a good solid double knot tie, and head back toward the love of God.

"Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate a [sibling] are liars."

## Discussion Questions

1. When has fear motivated you for good?
2. When has fear overtaken you for the worse?
3. Reflect on this quote from Pastor Jim, "*Fear is tamed when we live in God's love.*"
4. If we consider creation as other siblings in Christ, what kind of meaning does this quote take on, "*Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate a sibling, are liars.*"
5. Reflect on the quote below from Master Yoda.

## Prayer

In God, who casts out all fear. Help us confront the dark places inside of ourselves that brew hatred and cause suffering. Surround us with a community to love and to help draw us back when we wander down paths that are not healthy, nor life affirming, not peaceful. **Amen.**

*"Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger.  
Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering."*