



# TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*on the Branford Green*

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Looking fear in the eye

July 3, 2016

The Rev. Sharon K. Gracen

What are you afraid of? We could make a huge list here. We fear losing things; a job, a lover, our health, our minds, independence, security, often financial. In California, I encountered a toxic strand of this. Men were convinced that if they were not rich and successful enough that their wives would divorce them. The women were terrified that the loss of their youth and their silhouette would lead to their husband looking for a newer model. It was crazy and sad and very real out there.

Parents have become terrified of letting their children out of their sight. Kids are bundled up, helmeted and knee padded to within an inch of their lives. Our homes are filled with anti-bacterial everything. Heaven forbid that kids should play in the dirt and skin their knees. And of course predators, on line and behind every bush on the block.

What else? We fear not having enough. This is distressingly real. I won't have enough to live on or retire on? We fear failure and success in equal parts. What if I never realize my dreams. What if I do and then I fail? And what if people see me fail? That fear can be so crippling that people may not even try and that is sad.

There are common fears; snakes, snakes on a plane, public speaking, bugs - show my big hulking son a bee and he is undone. From the scary dark basement to the monsters under our bed, we have perpetual opportunities to be afraid. Some we grow out of. Some we acquire.

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This may seem like an unrelated next sentence, but trust me, I'll connect them. Winston Churchill has been often quoted saying some form of "democracy is the worst form of government, except for all of the others." We saw this week in the Brexit vote one of the week spots of democracy. People can be scared into a particular vote. A couple of weeks before the vote, those running the campaign to leave the European Union were aware that their economic message wasn't getting them anywhere so they changed their tactics. They went right to the fear button. All European countries have experienced increased immigration in the last 20 years. In part due to global unrest, the millions - make that 65 million - have been driven from their homes needing somewhere safe to go - countries everywhere are struggling to respond. Add to that the easing of movement within the European Union and lots of people from places with struggling economies have gravitated to countries with better opportunities. This has created competition for jobs in a changed and challenging global economy. What better way to get people to vote to leave the European Union than to repeatedly tell people that there is a horde of immigrants at the border who are going to come and take what little is left of life as working class Brits knew it. There was a heavy dash of prejudice against Middle Easterners and people from Poland thrown in and it worked. The fear and its companion, hatred, won the day and the majority of those who voted, voted to leave. There were two reactions - the first was voter remorse - "well, I voted to leave, but I didn't really mean it or think that my vote would matter." The second reaction has been a shocking surge of hateful attacks on anyone whose family hasn't been in Britain since the Magna Carta was signed. "We voted to leave, now you leave" as common sentiment. Now I am not claiming that the flood of immigrants coming out of Syria, Afghanistan, and too many African nations, isn't a real problem. But we don't need manufactured fear - that is the weak spot of democracy. The human fear response is easily triggered.

What are you afraid of? is a question that changed my life. I know I've told you this story before but it's the best illustration that I know. After my son was born, I spiraled down into a deep, dark depression. I was regularly incapacitated. One morning I couldn't get out of bed. I literally had the covers pulled up over my head, hyperventilating, shaking, shivering. And suddenly, as if it had been spoken to me, the question, "what are you afraid of?" filled my awareness. It was so strong that I stopped hyperventilating, shaking and shivering and tried to answer the question. The only thing I could come up with was the sleeping baby down the hall. "Get up" was the next communication. I ignored it. "Get up!" So I did, dragging my sorry self down the hall into Brady's room. I stood there, a terrified young mother, and I looked down into the crib. As I looked at that eight pounds of cuteness, all of my fear evaporated. I could feel it leave my body and in that moment, I learned the greatest lesson of my life. Being afraid is a waste of time, a waste of a life, a waste of possibilities. Getting up and looking your fear in the eye is extraordinarily powerful. In that moment, I became fearless. I have learned that if I am afraid of something, it is beckoning to me so that I will learn something new, expand my horizon, or discover something about myself.

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So why do you think that Jesus sent his folks out? I doubt that it was just to hone their healing skills. It got them out of their comfortable places, into communities of people that they did not know. He sent them to heal and in those times, that meant to come into contact with people who were dangerously unclean. The teams sent two by two had to touch the untouchables, love the unlikables, live and eat with people whom they didn't know. Jesus gave them the formula for overcoming fear. First he said go, go into the unknown and then he showed them that we never have to go anywhere or do anything alone. Even if we don't have a traveling companion, we always have the presence of Christ and the ever-surprising Spirit. Knowing what that feels like is very important when you are afraid.

There are lots of things for us to be genuinely concerned about on 21st century earth. But concerns do not incapacitate you the way that fear does. Fear locks up your brain and traps you in a limited place. Strength and resilience come when you realize that you have a choice. You can dwell in fear or you can get up and face it and see what happens next.

I am so grateful that we will get to miss three months of political campaigning. I think it's pretty clear that fear-mongering will be much used political strategy. It's good to learn to ask "who benefits from my being afraid?" Someone who wants you to be afraid does not have your best interests at heart. When you start to feel you fear and anxiety response, hear the words of Jesus, "don't be afraid" and "I will be with you always."

I leave you with some song lyrics from Carrie Newcomer:

When I was small I often said  
There were ugly things beneath my bed  
I'd slip downstairs when I got scared  
Into the safety of Dad's easy chair  
That chair was like a long deep sigh  
And I'd stay until he'd say, "It's time"  
But he'd always smile and put his hand in mine  
And say, "I'll go too."

Chorus: "I'll go too, I'll go too"  
That's what he'd say and what he'd do  
"Don't go alone I'll walk with you  
I'll go too."

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When I was learning how to swim  
I'd look down at the water and back at him  
He'd say "Take my hand, we'll both jump in"  
And "I'll go too."

So many nights I've wandered  
So many things to brave  
So many acts of courage  
We face each and every day

It was almost noon in a white lace dress  
I had my doubts if I could do the rest  
He said, "Take my hand, just do your best"  
"And I'll go too"

In a quiet place in the April snow  
It was time to finally let her go  
So I took his hand and said  
"I know."  
"I'll go too"

Someday we all will understand  
And we'll walk right into the Promised Land  
But I hope an angel takes me by the hand  
And tells me "I'll go too"

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