

# Love in a time of fear

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*Sunday 29 March 2020*

Unshakeable God, you are our ever-present help in times of trouble. Among all the isolation, grief and fear caused by this crisis, renew in us your peace, restore to us your perspective, and reveal to us your presence as we spend this time with you now. Amen.

We give thanks to God for the assurance of his protection and provision today, and praise him in the words of the Psalm:

- <sup>1</sup> The LORD is my light and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?  
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid?
- <sup>2</sup> When evildoers assail me  
to devour my flesh—  
my adversaries and foes—  
they shall stumble and fall.
- <sup>3</sup> Though an army encamp against me,  
my heart shall not fear;  
though war rise up against me,  
yet I will be confident.
- <sup>4</sup> One thing I asked of the LORD,  
that will I seek after:  
to live in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to behold the beauty of the LORD,  
and to inquire in his temple.
- <sup>5</sup> For he will hide me in his shelter  
in the day of trouble;  
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;  
he will set me high on a rock.

Psalm 27:1-5 (NRSV)

In the coming weeks we will reflect on God's word against the backdrop of the Coronavirus crisis, with all its uncertainties, isolation and fears. We start with Christ's invitation to love in a time of fear.

<sup>15</sup> God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. <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.

1 John 4:15–19 (NRSV)

Everywhere we look right now we encounter fear. The news is scary. There is fear in peoples' eyes. But the apostle John says that God's 'perfect love drives out fear'. The word for driving out here means to throw. It's the same word used of Jesus driving out the money-lenders from the temple, and driving demons out of the oppressed. It's forceful. Love doesn't just soothe our fear. It isn't polite. There is a strength about the way it kicks terror out of our hearts and minds. It's important to face the facts, even when they are scary, but even more important to focus on the ultimate and enduring reality of God's love.

Good Friday is only a few days away. As we focus upon Christ on the cross, we acknowledging its terror but we also give thanks for this tangible proof that love wins.

Remembering the way that Jesus had compassion upon Mary, even from the cross, we pause and think now of people who are particularly fearful at this time - the elderly, the unwell and those without work - presenting each one to Christ on the cross and entrusting them to his love.

*Pause and pray*

As we pray these things we hear God's words to his people:

- <sup>1</sup> But now thus says the LORD,  
he who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel:  
"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine.
- <sup>2</sup> When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you."

Isaiah 43:1–2 (NRSV)

Whatever these days may hold,  
whatever the tomorrow might bring,  
the future is secure, for Christ is with us,  
the same yesterday, today and for ever.

Live each moment with him  
in quiet confidence and joyful celebration,  
for he is ours and we are his for all eternity.

Amen.