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So What Are You Afraid Of?

Are you afraid? Apparently many of us are. There are over five hundred named fears in scientific literature. We all know the most famous of them: claustrophobia, arachnophobia, agoraphobia. But how about these ... papyrophobia (fear of paper), ichtheophobia (fear of fish), or arachibutyrophobia (fear of peanut butter sticking to the roof of your mouth)? And there are five hundred more named and recognized fears besides.

Of course we human beings clearly vary in how debilitating we find our fears to be, but wouldn't virtually all of us have to admit that whether severe or mild, whether continual or periodic, the experience of fear is universal? Why would that be so? Some suggest fear is only possible because we humans are capable of imagining the future. Imagining the future to be good brings joy, but imagining the future to be bad results in fear. That makes joy and fear the odd couple of human existence whose relationship must reach a healthy equilibrium. Because while a certain level of fearfulness may result in necessary caution and self-protective behavior, too much fear is disastrous for a life. If fear becomes too grand, or too strong, or too overbearing, it will bully its partner, joy, into becoming a shrinking violet that barely lifts her head.

What are you afraid of, and are your fears in proper balance with the joys in your life? One way to assess that would be to see if some common debilitating fears have taken on an influential role in your life. For example: Are you afraid for your health? For your children's prospects? For your financial future? Are you afraid of what people may say? Are you afraid of losing the one you love, or of truly loving the one you are already with? Are you afraid of change? Are you afraid that nothing will ever change? Are you afraid, without quite knowing why? As we've noted, there are many, many ways to fear – at least five hundred of them.

Maybe that's why whenever an angel, as a messenger from God to the world, makes a Biblical appearance, the first words from the angel's mouth are likely to be, "Don't be afraid!" That assurance is meant to convey to worried people that at the heart of their reality, even if imperceptible just now, are causes for joy, not fear. The inner heart of reality holds meaning, goodness, power, and grace.

Don't be afraid! Perhaps that message ought to precede our every conversation and every pronouncement to one another, too. Maybe we ought to school ourselves and our children and their children in imagining a future that is virtually fearless. Now, that doesn't mean we should advocate recklessness or irresponsibility. It simply means that we could claim, as God's children, the extraordinarily comforting perspective that despite the hardships and disappointment of life, God wants us to embrace the fullness of life and find joy.

Are you still afraid? Then hear the age old message as meant today for you—Don't be afraid!