

Fear. Is there any more pervasive or powerful motivating force in human experience?

From the moment we are born, we learn to fear the world around us, certainly to fear the stranger, sometimes to fear even those who are closest to us. Political leaders have long recognised the power of fear in ensuring our conformity to the structures this world, even when doing so does not serve our best interests. Fear is the driving force behind vast segments of our economy, as well as, increasingly, our political priorities.

Jesus recognises that fear will also cause the failure of discipleship. Jesus' disciples courageously leave the security of their homes and families to follow him as they proclaim the advent of God's reign, but they, too, will know and ultimately bow before the power of fear. Faithful proclamation and practice of the Gospel inevitably puts disciples on a collision course with the powers of this world. So, as Jesus prepares his disciples for their mission to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel," he is starkly realistic about the threats they will face, at the same time he builds the case for why they should not let this fear master them or hinder their witness.

The claim that whatever is covered up will be uncovered and secrets made known arises from the power of the Gospel, in which the disciples participate through the means of their mission. Their simplicity, vulnerability, and dependence on God demonstrate the reality of God's presence and character in the face the world's claims to possess real power. Even though doing so will bring suffering, the Gospel must now be proclaimed "in the light and from the housetops" (Mtt10:27), for the Gospel proclaimed and lived is the most powerful tool at the disciples' disposal against the powers of this world.

The answers to fear, then, include clear-eyed recognition of the façades of human power, even those rooted in the threat of death, awareness of the conflict and division the Gospel inevitably produces, and especially the deep awareness and conviction that God is present in the world, in mercy and compassion.

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