

“Taking a Good Look at Fear”

Matthew 24:22-33

In Somalia today, there are ominous parallels with 1992: pervasive fighting among rival clans, far too little rain, and an inability among international peacekeeping forces to restore order or ensure that food aid reaches those in need. Nineteen years ago, the result was the death by starvation of 300,000 Somalis. Will it happen again?

It doesn't have to. But everything depends on how the world responds.

In some ways, the current situation is more complicated. One reason lies outside of Somalia altogether: the painful set of memories associated with our attempts to help in 1992, particularly in the United States. Then, the U.S. response was a forceful military intervention. President George H.W. Bush dispatched 25,000 American troops to Somalia, allowing food deliveries to resume, and preventing as many as 200,000 additional deaths. But in October 1993, [famously](#), two Black Hawk helicopters were shot down in Mogadishu, 18 U.S. soldiers died, and the body of one dead American was dragged triumphantly through the streets. Public outrage forced President Clinton to terminate the mission. As a consequence, it's unlikely that U.S. policy makers will come close to taking similarly dramatic steps today.

Meanwhile, two factors on the ground in Somalia itself threaten to make the current crisis more dangerous than the previous one. First, the drought is much worse this time -- perhaps the worst of its kind in 60 years. Second, there is now an Islamist militant organization, [Al-Shabab](#), controlling the southern region of Somalia, where the drought has been most severe. The 2 million people living in this region cannot get food aid, because Al-Shabab's leadership, which brags about its close ties to Al-Qaeda, distrusts food-aid workers as spies. The propaganda they project among those living under their control is that it is better to starve than to accept help from the West.

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One way to look at the world today is to look at how fear controls humanity's part in world events. Surely, the people of Somalia, unable to survive the famine that results from the drought, are living in fear. Their fear, I would think, is beyond our understanding. The fear of the people trying to make their way to the border of Ethiopia, to the camps there, must be something most of us will never experience.

And the fear of the world – even its care organizations – to intervene, is palpable in the unfolding of events.

The fear of those in power who abuse the people by attacking aid workers, by taking much of what is brought into the country for their own, is less palpable, perhaps less visible to us. We do not associate fear and power. But power of this sort is the power of control, control of fiefdoms, of ancient rivalries, of the powerful against the poor. This is fear, as well.

The story of the disciples in the boat as the storm comes up is really an image of fear – and of love, a kind of power. Some say there are only two things at work in the world: fear and love. Think about the world that way as you leave worship today. Look around you as you drive away from church. Where do you see fear in the people on the lake? Where do you see love?

Some say there are only two realities: fear and love.

I suppose it's easy to look at the story of Jesus and to call it a miracle of the highest order, certainly something that would not ever happen again. But I'm not sure of that! Throughout history there have been stories of people saved within inches of a speeding train or bullet. There have been stories of the yogis, walking across a blanket of burning coals.

And there is Jesus, walking on the water. If we consider this a onetime event, then we miss the story. We miss the power of love in the midst of fear.

Peter, after all, started out all right. There he was, walking on water, just like Jesus! Then, *doubt* entered the picture! *Doubt* – to be at variance with oneself... Peter must have been in touch with his whole self, his deeper self, the part that leads, until he began to doubt. Doubt is a matter of the mind. Doubt is how the mind works. We are clear, we trust our instincts, we walk on water – and then, doubt enters the picture. We equivocate. We seek to please. We notice our audience. We preen and present ourselves properly. And the moment is lost, that moment of freedom, from fear.

How is fear operating in your life today? Because the way you are living your fear – or not – is closely related to the power plays that are preventing food from getting to the starving people of Somalia today. Unless some of us take our lives in our hands and begin to live without fear, the world will never change, and the people will go on starving at the hands of the fearful, power-hungry, abusive leaders. So it is imperative that we begin to face our fear.

At a certain time in my life, I was looking closely at my fear. Every few months I had a dream. I was facing a huge wall, and sometimes I was climbing the wall. As time went on, and as the dream reappeared, I began to reach the top of the wall. Instinctively, I knew it was my fear, and that I was making headway.

How do you do that? How do I do that? Because I am facing my fears, even today, shedding those parts of myself that collude with the ugly powers of the world that lead by force fueled by fear.

Think about fear, first of all. Think about your life from the perspective of fear. Hold fear as a question, in your heart, in your mind, in your hand. Turn it over and over, look at it.

One time I was very angry about something. Like most important things, I can't recall what I was so angry about. At that time, a very wise friend told me that he had learned that underneath anger was fear. What was I really afraid of? Most of the time, when we vent our anger, we have "friends" who take our side, who listen to our tale of anger and what someone did to us. Instead, my friend looked at my anger without fear, and guided me to look at my own fear, to take control of my own life.

When we are motivated by our fear, we have given control of our lives to others: to the powers that be, to our partners, to our children, to our bosses, to the government, to the political parties, to the leaders...

Fear = False Expectations Assumed Real

How often do you continue to relate to others and to the world as you did when you were a fearful child? How often do you complain in the face of injustice, rather than look at your own collusion? Our fear keeps us bound.

Some of us show our fear by running head first into life, without checking out the real dangers. That's a way of being led by fear, as well. Maybe Peter wanted to show the other disciples how he was not afraid! So he jumped right into the water, popped up onto the surface, and walked on the water, until doubt came in!

Several years ago I took a class specifically for adults who are afraid of the water. This is a method of learning to swim designed by Melon Dash, and educator from Berkeley. Now her classes go all over the world, teaching adults how to scuba dive, beginning with their fear. Melon's method of teaching works, and it works by having the students go into their fear when they experience it. That is, she has the students feel the sensation in their bodies, move from their heads, where the doubt is, into their bodies, which are grounding. Most of our fears originate in our thinking, our doubts, our thought processes.

From the edge of the pool, to the deepest end, where I spent most of my time floating and enjoying the meditation of the deep water, I conquered my fear, which is Melon's claim.

Go into the deep of your fears. Go where Peter went. Even his dropping into the water was not a defeat – it was a learning about his fear. Go into the deep of your fears.

“Be not afraid,” the words of the angels.