

Exodus: Redemption: Their Story Is Our Story

"The issue of the election two weeks from tomorrow is not an ordinary issue, but the question of whether the American form of government is to survive. This is the most important election of our lifetime." You may be surprised, as familiar as that line is, to hear that this quote is from Orville Atwood, who was the Michigan Secretary of State back in 1936. It's a familiar trope, one that has become a tradition about every four years, where we talk about how it is the most important election of our lifetime. There's a tradition with us in that we look at our elections as the most important thing that we have.

I want to address this concept because what's underneath the surface of that are the emotions in American life of fear and anxiety. There is something beneath the surface that we feel compelled to this. I don't know how to judge if this is the most important election of our lifetime or not. If it goes all the way back to 1936, the results are concerning knowing that if it is true that it was the most important election of their lifetime and subsequently every election is for us as well, that's troubling because we live in an increasingly hostile world. If it isn't true, then that's also concerning because we're running and operating out of a state of fear.

Recently, a poll suggested that 73 percent of Americans expressed anxiety related to this election. The anxiety comes from fears of the stability of democracy, concerns about economic collapse, and potential violence. Insert your choice of fear here. We live in an age of anxiety or what some experts call ambient anxiety.

What we mean by ambient anxiety is that there seems to be, right beneath the surface, a subtle simmering of uncertainty, of fear, where we lean in and allow these emotions to percolate. We don't know how to handle it other than we live and operate from that space. Now, fear isn't necessarily a bad emotion. It's one of our greatest survival mechanisms instilled in us by God. It triggers us in such a way that we can respond to the uncertainty of what's before us. However, the problem with fear is that because it is so strong and built into that survival mechanism, it is easily manipulated and coerced.

In our history, we are constantly being played off these fears of what we are to expect about this candidate or that candidate. Fear stimulates our bodies to prepare for a potential threat. What we must come to realize about fear is it operates in unreality. That's not a bad thing. Fear stimulates us because we're uncertain of the predator, like the animal or whatever that pops in front of us. We need that fear response to prepare ourselves for action, but we must recognize its potential threat.

It operates in unreality, and causes us to do crazy things. Have you ever acted out of fear and then realized that's not what you typically do or how you generally respond? Rich Villodius is a pastor in New York, and

I heard him say that fear is the currency of a hostile age. At least dating back to 1936, fear tends to be the operating system beneath the surface in which we continue to polarize one another and in a hostile age, fear becomes currency. Whoever can control the fears can control the narrative. Fear, and I don't want to downplay the role of fear by any stretch, causes us to act differently. It causes us to act and operate in ways we typically wouldn't.

My main point this morning is that idolatry grows in the soil of fear. What we'll see in the life of Israel is that they came to this moment when they were at Mount Sinai and were in a moment of fear. They look to this mountain, the uncertainty of what stood before them. They had just been saved and liberated from slavery in Egypt, and they were at this place and fear was consuming them.

You'll see in the text that we are on a split screen of sorts. We are in a moment in the story in which the people of God are at the base of Mount Sinai. Moses goes up the mountain. Exodus 32 is like in the theatre when they say, "Meanwhile..." then it flashes to a different scene. That's what's happening. Moses is up on the mountain, communicating with God directly, and the people are down at the bottom of the mountain, doing the exact opposite of what God is commanding them to do. We'll set the stage in Exodus 20. God had just given Moses the Ten Commandments.

When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning. The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was." Exodus 20:18-21

What happens here is they look up on this mountain, and it's smoking and quaking. This would naturally induce fear in all of us. They are seeing this thing, and in their fear, they're uncertain of what to do. The text says they trembled in fear, but then notice the next line at the end of 18, "They stayed at a distance." There's something in fear that we see here with the people of God that distances us from God. There was a concern of how to approach. How to come to this God.

Remember the whole scene. God had just liberated them. He had just been so good to them. He had just fought for them and freed them from slavery. And yet, there's something in this moment where the uncertainty seems to overtake them. It says they stayed at a distance. The fear isn't unwarranted. Look at verse 19. It comes from a deep place

within them. As they stayed at a distance, the fear had been rooted in their life in such a way that the very idea of hearing from God directly was so fearful. All they were seeing was that we might die. Look at how powerful this God is.

That's not necessarily a wrong emotion to recognize the power of God, but there's something in their fear that's different from what Moses will differentiate from in a second. Their fear was distorted and created a false conception of who God is. It had distorted reality. If this God is the God who liberated them from 400 years of oppression, they had just watched him do all the plagues, going to war with the Egyptian gods, overcoming all of them, splitting the Red Sea, leading them out of all of that. If, out of that, they came to the conclusion that this God didn't love them and isn't for them, their operating base is fear. Is that not a distortion of reality? Is that not something different than what they actually know is true of God?

They looked at this God who loved them, who led them out of slavery based on nothing they had done but his own very character, and they said, "If he speaks to us, we're going to die. Moses then says not to be afraid. That's what he says to the people. God has come to test you so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning. Now, here's the problem: Moses says to the people not to be afraid because they're supposed to be afraid. God is testing you to see if you have the fear of God in you.

The first thing we need to notice is the differentiation in fear. The very fact that Moses says, do not be afraid, yet fear means there are two different kinds of fear. This tells me that when Moses is speaking to the fear of God, he's not using the same fear emotion that they just had of dying due to God speaking to them. There's some difference in that. There's a way to not distort reality but recognize God for who he is.

We talk a lot about the fear of God. We could have series after series on this concept of what it means to fear God. All I want you to note is the distinction Moses makes between the fear they were experiencing and the fear they were supposed to have. Let's dig a little deeper.

This word in Hebrew is *yirah*, and it means fear. That's a good translation. But you can tell the biblical translators struggled to capture the essence of this because they talk about it as also being an awesomeness, awestruck, a fear of fearing or a reverence. The translation of fear isn't wrong, but it's connoting something slightly different. Throughout the scriptures, this idea of the fear of the Lord is most commonly linked back to this verse in Proverbs 1:7, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*"

This frames our understanding of this fear of the Lord. What this is leading to if the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge or wisdom, as stated later in Proverbs, the fear of God is not so much that I'm going to die in the presence of God, although it is a recognition of his magnitude. You sense the tension even as I'm trying to explain this. It has something more to do with the proper understanding of my place within the universe in contrast to God's power and majesty.

The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom is about recognizing my interdependence on God. It's about the recognition that I am a tiny creature and that all of my life, knowledge, energy, and everything comes and flows from God as a gift to us. So until I come to that place of the recognition of who I am and have a proper view of myself in God's good universe, I will often overstep and assume the role of God.

If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, that also means that I am not the arbiter of how this life is to operate. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, it's me recognizing that I am a created being, and therefore, the Creator of me is the one who arbitrates what is right and wrong. Often, we get caught uncertain, wanting to outsize the view of who we are and believe that we are the arbiters of right and wrong.

This concept of the fear of the Lord and its necessity of the interdependence of my life with God grinds against what we understand of the American way of life: I am the author of what is true and what is not. I am the one who controls the destiny of my life. Moses is saying, "Don't fear that God is not for you but fear God in recognizing that you are a tiny creature in God's good universe. And then, of course, he's thinking, "Did not God just rescue you? He is a good God."

Fear, this concept that plays out in the unknown in unreality, is dependent a lot on what is reality. If fear wells up in you and you are focused on what potentially could happen and then you come to realize it's quite safe and good, the fear changes. If God is who God has been forever, then the fear of God is not about a fear of my own death in the presence of God. It's about recognizing the outsized view I have of myself.

Do you see the difference? It matters. The character of God. The fear of the Lord, the recognition of who God is, is the beginning of wisdom. It's one thing to fear God if your view of him is that he's a monster. It's a whole other thing to have an assurance that God is good and communes and saves and redeems you.

The foundation of our life is that God is love. That's what John would teach us. And perfect love casts out fear. The character of God matters. That's why Tozer wrote, "What comes to mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you." Because often, we become like the image of God that we hold. If God is love, then we can rightfully recognize our place before this God. Nonetheless, even as Moses communicated this to them, it said the people remained at a distance, and Moses approached.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites this: 'You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven: Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold. vv. 22-23

The first response after this encounter with God of having a proper right-sized fear of God is worship. That's the proper next response. So that's why God said not to make any other gods. Here is the proper ordering of worship. Then he goes into the altar thing and the steps. Do you remember that from last week? He talks about how we are to worship God properly. Then he gives those instructions. Moses climbs

up the mountain, he receives the commandments, and we see that play out. Then, meanwhile, let's flash forward to Exodus 32.

So while Moses is up there receiving more instruction, more tablets of laws and rules, and all that about the covenant relationship that would take place, and he's been up there for a while now, we arrive at chapter 32.

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him." v. 1

Some time had passed. We don't exactly know how much, but it isn't quite like an instant from the command God just gave to this. They had been through a lot in the past few months. I don't think they had forgotten about what God had done. Yet here, while Moses is up on the mountain with that clear instruction left with them to not make any other gods out of gold or silver, it says they're looking for their leader, and as he descended into that dark mountain, they are thinking that he must be dead.

It's the same fear that they had before. If God speaks to us, we may die. Well, Moses disappears into the mountain, and it makes sense for them to wonder if he is ever coming back down. How long will he be up there? That same fear all of a sudden begins to percolate. The uncertainty. Why did you bring us out here? We'll see this in the story going forward as they begin to wander further into the wilderness. This fear of the unknown and uncertainty hovers beneath the surface. They say, "As for this fellow Moses, we don't know where he is."

In their fear, the text says they gathered around Aaron. Now, the phrase "around Aaron" is a good translation, but it doesn't catch its nuance. It might be better understood as they gathered against Aaron. There's a bit of a mob inciting this division. They encircled Aaron and demanded him to make them gods who would go before them. That should evoke the imagery of what Yahweh had just done for them in going before them through the Red Sea.

They're saying they needed, as this fear was happening, someone to go in front of them and this God seemed to be absent. So they demanded Aaron to make them another god, which is fascinating when you think of the idea of constructing a god and then placing your hope in it to protect you—the thing you just made. Do we see the logic of it?

But before we judge them, let's consider this story. Had they not just, for generation after generation, been in Egypt, which was a plural society where many gods were worshipped? They had been culturally formed under an environment in which the worship of gods in totems and items and silver and gold was the norm. What they're doing here is, of course, apostasy. They're leaving the way of Yahweh for sure, but they're also diverting back to the only thing they knew. They had been formed by Egypt, and so in that moment of fear and uncertainty, the idols of Egypt percolate back up.

Idolatry grows in the soil of fear. They're trying to grasp for control. That's really the root behind all idols. There's a search for control of

what we don't understand. Fear is rooted in the recognition you may not be in control, and so, therefore, you reach for control. So, they reverted back to what we knew. They fell back into the idols they were so formed by and was at the heart of their culture.

We often do this as well if we're honest with ourselves. We tend to question them and wonder how they could do this. And yet, even though our idols may not be made of gold and silver, we fall back into the same traps. The same idols of our culture tend to pop up within our hearts, whether it's power, pleasure, greed, materialism, or human expression. The idea that I am the arbiter of right and wrong and can author my own story, those are the idols of our time. When we experience fear, we tend to grasp for those.

Maybe it's the power to control the circumstances. Maybe it's pleasure to escape the circumstances. Whatever it is, we must begin to see ourselves in the Israelites here in that we, too, have a cultural formation that happens way deeper than we realize in the automatic responses of our life in which we are trying to control that which is unknown, and it stems from fear. Now, after this, they make this declaration:

Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." vv. 2-4

Now, this is a direct reversal of what God had said at the beginning of the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:2. "*I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of Egypt.*" Verse 32:4. "*These are your gods, Israel, who brought you out of Egypt.*" See, they had exchanged the reality and presence of God for what Christopher Wright, an Old Testament scholar, calls a "Grotesque parody of divine presence."

They had taken to, out of their fear, making and controlling the scenario. They had formed this god, made it of their own image, and said, "This is the one who brought us out of Egypt." A grotesque parody of divine presence. That's what happens when idols are shaped and formed. We place on them the ultimacy that we can only find in God.

Remember the phrase that we find a lot in Ecclesiastes, in which eternity has been placed in the heart of humankind. So we are longing to make sense and find that transcendence of something much bigger that can make sense of life. We search for it in all these different idols and things, and they're nothing but parodies of what our hearts most long for.

Often, they're good things that are turned into ultimate things. It isn't that sexuality and money and all those things are bad, but when they become the ultimate thing that you try to use and go to when trying to make sense of life or control your circumstances, that is when it supersedes the role of God. The problem with idols is not just that they're false. It's that they can never deliver what you expect from them. So, the idols are false. They aren't gods, but that's not the biggest issue with them.

The issue at the heart of why God is saying not to make any other gods is he's saying that you won't find what you're looking for there. They're shallow; they're hollow. He is saying that if, in your fear, you're rushing to control things and forming these idols, they won't make sense of reality. They don't match with reality. It reminds me of Paul's words in Romans 1. There's some debate on what Paul's referencing here, but most scholars agree that he's talking about this scene in Exodus 32.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Romans 1:21-23, 25

Another Old Testament scholar, Richard B. Hayes, said, "The golden calf story becomes a parable for the human condition apart from the gospel, a condition of self-destructive idolatry." The problem with idols is that they're self-destructive. They can't deliver on what they promise. They're an exchange of what our heart most longs for, the divine presence of God. We've built idols and think that they will satisfy us, but they won't.

When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow, there will be a festival to the Lord." So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' Exodus 32:5-8

You can almost hear the distress in God's voice. I mean, imagine what he's experiencing at this moment. He's done all of this for these people. He's longing for them to be his chosen. And yet he looks down the mountain and watches what's taking place down below. A gross parody of divine presence. But in the midst of that, catch in verse 5, in which Aaron acquiesces to their demands, builds the altar in front of them, and then tries to sanctify it. He's trying to find a way to still hold this together.

You can feel the pain in Aaron as well. You can recognize that he feels maybe a little bit caught between a rock and a hard place. So, he just tells the people, "Hey, tomorrow, let's make a festival to the Lord." Sometimes idols can turn into this mode in which the only way we feel we can recover it is by using the language of God as a veneer to make it seem like this is actually worshipping God. We can think maybe if we just call it and name it as God's, then it'll be sanctioned.

We use the language and worship of God to cover up something much more insidious. An abandonment of allegiance, an abandonment of what we know is true. And then verse 6 and beyond is a liturgy of worship that was designed to be for Yahweh. They carry it out before this golden calf, and God looks down and says, "The people have become corrupt. They've placed their hope in things that can't satisfy and things other than what they should."

There's that haunting line in which he says, "These are your gods Israel." Imagine the heartbreak. What you're witnessing in this scene is using the Lord's name in vain, which was a part of the Ten Commandments. To use the Lord's name in vain is not to use a cuss word. There are different commands about that. It's to assume and name something as God's when it isn't. That is to use the Lord's name in vain.

It is right here. They will worship this idol, but they called it a festival of the Lord. That is not what the Lord's name is. And it's here that we find this mixing, this difference of those allegiance. It stems from the fear. The Israelites are experiencing the uncertainty of what's before them.

I want to talk a little bit more about this concept of fear. There is much more that could be said about this text, and we'll come back to it later when we make our way towards it in the text. From this, just to give you a sneak peek, God is very upset, and he says, "I'm going to destroy the people." Yet Moses intercedes on their behalf, and there's this beautiful exchange in which the God of mercy shows himself to be just that, a God of mercy, and welcomes his people back.

I want us to name that we're prone to these same temptations. In a fearful age, we have a tendency to allow idols to swell up within us. Idolatry grows in the soil of fear. And I want to caution us, wherever we land, given this week and the events of Tuesday that took place, that the response of both idolatry and fear is before us. Because the reality is that about half of us were elated by the results of the election. The other half of us are fearful, disappointed, concerned, and confused. I would imagine from my anecdotal experience of pastoring many of you that this is probably true of our people. We're probably 50/50. But I just want us to name that the response of fear and of idolatry is going to be a temptation before all of us.

I want to name a few things about that because I believe there is a direct correlation between the fears embedded within us and our propensity towards idolatry. So, we must be cautious about how we interpret the events of this past week. And fear creates that fertile ground in which we can choke out the very message of the gospel.

I was reminded this week of Matthew 13, in which Jesus is preaching and he's talking about the four soils. He said that this farmer goes out sowing the seeds of the gospel. As the farmer is throwing these out, there's one particular soil, the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth that choke out the word, making it unfruitful. I worry that as we walk through this season, if you're like me, the fear is so easily swelling up in front of us and within us that often, in that uncertainty, we must fight and find a way to remind ourselves that this is God's good world we live in. He is our hope.

We do not need to grab for control in other ways because we are not the ones who are ultimately in control. And too often, in fear, we reach for the idols of our culture. That's what we're witnessing broadly, by the way. The reason that our politics have become such a frenzy, why every election is the most important election of our lifetime is rooted in fear.

It's rooted in a culture that is fear because elections have consequences; I recognize that. It's not to dismiss your fears. But it's in those fears that a culture that's void of an understanding of who God is and that fear of God is the beginning of knowledge are grabbing for control. The only thing we can reach for is maybe this or that politician will give us hope.

Some politicians are better than others. Some will bring greater success. Others won't. I get all that. I get all that. I'm not dismissing that. But the problem is if our hope is rooted in any circumstances, those circumstances will come and go. They will disappoint us. Idols cannot deliver. That's the problem with them. They can't deliver on what we place upon them.

I don't want to suggest that all of our political actions are driven by fear because they're not. I recognize that. I talked with many of you who struggled and prayed about approaching this thing, and you did it through the lens of Jesus. That's beautiful. That's what we're called to do, but we must be careful not to allow the circumstances of life to dictate our sense of peace and well-being. If you require the circumstances of your life to go well for peace, they won't. At some point, they won't. You will inevitably have to turn to something to make sense out of that. In that moment, you have the chance to reach and cry out to God and say, "God, can you root me deeper into you?" Or the opposite will be true in which you will have to manipulate, coerce, demand, bully, whatever it is, things other than God, to make sense of your life.

You are not in control of your own life and the destiny of this world. Much of the spiritual life, I believe, is learning to relinquish control and recognize that God is the one in control. I've been learning this much more as a parent recently, as my oldest daughter is reaching middle school, and my youngest is reaching the end of elementary school.

I often find that I can't control these beautiful daughters that God's given me. As much as I want to protect and secure them, the reality is they are their own beings. And if I attempt over and over, as I often do, to control them, two things happen. I get disappointed because they go and make decisions otherwise, but in the process, I do damage to them because in my controlling and wanting to control them, I place the weight of my own ego and displaced and disordered attachments on these girls. It's not a weight that they're called to bear. I could crush them and myself.

Much of walking with God is learning to radically accept the reality that life is broken, that this world is flawed, and that presidents will come and go. America's success will rise and fall. It'll do all those things, but yet we must find a way to root our life in something other than the circumstances of life and into the real presence of God, who is here and available.

So, how do we deal with these fears? Two things. First, fear reveals our trust structures, which is a phrase from author M. Robert Mulholland in his book *Invitation to a Journey*. It's a beautiful book. He has a section in which he deals with the topic of sin. He states that there are four layers of sin. I won't go through all of them, but it's helpful because we tend to think of sin as flat. We think of it just as moral negatives or actions that we do. That is just the top layer of sin. At the fourth layer, he writes that what sin really is, the deepest layer that's built within you is this idea of your trust structures. It's the things other than God on which you build your life to make sense of reality.

Sin, at this deepest level, is to build a trust structure on something like career success where you believe the only way you can be joyful and at peace in this life is if you get that promotion or get that job. Now, our trust structures are way deeper beneath the surface than we tend to realize. So, to continue with that example, what often happens is you don't realize you had a trust structure like that built up until you're laid off from that job, you retire, or move on, and you realize the job did something within you.

Now, remember, fear is the opportunity. It arises within. It's not a bad thing, but when that happens, we have the option of moving closer to God and asking for help to find peace, or we can do that more damaging thing, grasping for control in other ways. Fear reveals our trust structures.

I would suggest wherever you are at post-election, what is the fear there? Is that signifying anything? Is it pointing out a way in your heart that maybe is attached to something other than God? Because the propensity for idolatry grows in the soil of fear. It's what John Calvin would say that the human heart is a perpetual idol factory. What he meant is that our heart is longing to make sense of the world, and so when that fear comes and we are struggling to make sense of whatever the circumstances are, that trust structure we find is built on something else other than God. You have the opportunity to do something with the fear. We can run to God, or we can create idols to make sense of it.

It's really hard to live at peace in God's available kingdom when you need something other than God. When you make something other than God take that place, whether it's a bank statement, a tax bracket, a job, or an experience, it will ultimately disrupt. It will, like the people of Israel, keep you at a distance from the experience of God.

When you need something beyond God, provision or protection, something other than the eternal Jesus Christ, you will experience that dissonance. And that is, to use Mulholland's language, exposing your trust structures. I just shared mine. That happens when my daughters have to be a certain way, or look a certain way, or do a certain thing, or have this career path, or whatever it is. I'm fearful about that. I spend a lot of time in therapy and in prayer about that. Lord, where's that coming from? I have a vision of what their life should look like, and I hold on to it. It's a trust structure built on something other than God.

Second, fear reveals our need for control. I couldn't help, as I was writing this section, to think of Jesus when he was in the garden of Gethsemane

hours before he was crucified. He just says, "Not my will, but yours be done, Father." A total release of control. Jesus himself said, "Father, this is hard. If there's any other way." But in total surrender to the father, he just says, "Father, your will be done." There's freedom in that. We think of freedom in the opposite way, but there is freedom in being able to relinquish control and allow God to take the reins.

Third, we must learn to yield our fears to God. We have to learn how to take that anxiety, that uncertainty, and rather than impose on it and create an idol out of it, like the people of Israel, we turn to God and yield control and say, "God, I don't know what will happen. But Lord, you have said your kingdom is here, and we are in your good kingdom. We're living in the reality of your presence."

There are two ways you can deal with fear. You could just solve all your problems. You can do it. Yeah. I mean, I guess you could just try to solve it, but I would suggest that probably won't happen. Even if you tamp them down for a moment, something else will pop up, and you just have to keep trying over and over. You could try that. Or you can come to the place of acceptance of life's problems and the world's failures and recognize something beyond that will guide you.

Lesslie Newbigin, a missiologist, once said, "I'm neither an optimist nor a pessimist, but Jesus Christ has risen from the dead." So that is the thing that grounds him. I'm not an optimist and I'm not a pessimist, but Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. I want to lead us in a time of prayer where we can surface some of these things and bring them to the Lord.

I want to use St. Ignatius of Loyola. He was famous for developing what he called the spiritual exercises, which were, just as it sounds, practices and rhythms in which you come before the Lord to open up your life and partner with the Holy Spirit and form you more into Christ. I want to give you a quote from him in which he called this the first principle in the foundation.

In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance before all created gifts insofar as we have a choice and are not bound by some responsibility. We should not fix our desires on health or sickness, wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one. For everything has the potential of calling forth in us a more loving response to our life forever with God. Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want and I choose what better leads to God's deepening life in me. St. Ignatius

Church, what would it look like for us to take those fears and use them as the thing that draws us to choose God's deepening life in us? I invite you to open your hands in front of you on your lap. It's a way of posturing your body. It isn't anything magical that happens, but rather, it sometimes, at least for me, opens up my heart a little bit more. It's a way of showing God with my body what I want to be true of my soul. I want you to take a couple of breaths. I'm guessing there's something

that the Lord has stirred within you in the past little bit, whether it's fear, conviction, or whatever it is; I invite you to slow down your breath and just name something beneath the surface that you sense God has been drawing to your mind as I've been preaching.

As you sit with the Lord, I just invite you to think through where any emotions are coming from. If they're coming from fear, I want you to offer those to the Lord and release control. If it's coming from joy, I invite you in a prayer to say, "Lord, would you temper any idolatry within my heart?" And ask the Lord if this joy is rooted in who he is. God, in you alone, the psalmist would say, the Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want Jesus, in Matthew 11, says,

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30

Church, our God is a good God, gracious, compassionate, and merciful. May we come to believe that in the depths of who we are. He loves us, not for who we think we should be, but for who we are now. God loves you. May we come to find our life in that truth, and may we rest in that.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2024 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No. 1484-14FC