

***THERE IS NO FEAR IN LOVE***  
© Rev. Dr. Gary Blaine  
University Congregational Church  
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**Reading: Deuteronomy 31: 6**

**Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.**

**I John 4: 16 – 19**

**So we know 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. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is not 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. We love because he first loved us.**

The so-called “underwear bomber,” attempted to detonate an explosive device on a jetliner from Amsterdam to Detroit, Michigan this past Christmas day. The attempt failed as you all know but there has been great fear and acrimony over the event. Understandably, people are upset about the failure of communication in the intelligence community. They want to know how Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab ever got on the airplane in the first place. There is great discussion about better airport screening devices. This past week people have argued about the interrogation practices utilized by the F.B.I. to get information from this would-be terrorist.

We also heard this week from the various heads of U. S. intelligence services that another attempted terror attack on American soil in the next three to six months is “certain.” No one knows whether this will be from foreign terrorists or “homegrown” terrorists already living in the United States. There is also no certainty about the kind of attack that we might expect. Could it be a cyber attack on the virtual technology of America’s military and commercial sections? Could it be another airline attack with explosives? Or could it be some kind of biological attack in one of America’s malls or subway systems?

No one can say. We are not certain of any of that. We are only certain that something will happen.

I, for one, believe that we ought to employ the best screening equipment. I think our intelligence community ought to operate as a seamless garment, sharing information with tremendous expediency. Anything that we can do within reason to secure our borders and ports must be employed.

Having said all of that, I remain certain that there will be terrorist attacks. They will vary in scope and style. Buildings will be destroyed, economies disrupted, people will be injured, and some will die. Some very determined extremists will find a loophole in the security system.

No president, general, or political party can guarantee us 100% security against the madness of terrorism

The Manchurian army breached the Great Wall of China in 1644. The French erected the Maginot Line certain that it would defend France from a German invasion. The theory was never really tested because in 1940 the Germans first conquered Belgium and invaded France from behind the Maginot Line. On April 10, 1912 the White Star Line put to sea the invincible *Titanic*, thought to be the most advanced technological wonder of the sea. She sank to the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean four days later.

In every one of these examples, and there are thousands more one could offer, all of the forces of human nature are at work: the will to power, driving human beings to coerce others to one's will; pride and the presumptions of superiority both in terms of offensive and defensive capability; greed and the forces of domination at every level of human civilization; anger and the sway of retributive justice that demands revenge; and finally fear, that paralyzing dread that immobilizes individuals as well society.

Everybody knows what it is like to be afraid. We have all been frightened by something. That kind of fear might actually keep you alive.

When you are afraid of something you are tempted to run away, which just might save your life.

I asked my son, Christopher, what was the most frightening experience he had while serving in Afghanistan a few years ago. He said, “Well dad, the most frightening experience was not the most dangerous experience I had in Afghanistan. We were on our way from our post in Gardez to Camp Phoenix to get supplies. The road runs through what is called “Terror Pass.” It is called “Terror Pass” because it runs through a narrow valley with steep hills on both sides of the road. It is easy for the Taliban to hide in the hills and shoot down onto caravans.

“As we were driving through “Terror Pass” we were met by a retreating company of Afghan Nationals. They were yelling, “Talibani, Talibani.” One soldier was carrying a man who was shot in the leg and brought him to me. I looked at the wound and saw that it was properly dressed. We had no interpreter and I kept making the sign of the cross to convince him to move on to a hospital. There was nothing more that we could do for the wounded man.

“Because of the retreat we were completely stopped in the road. But I don’t think we were there more than ten minutes. I knew how vulnerable we were. At some point in the middle of all of the noise and

confusion it seemed like everything began to move in slow motion. I realized at that moment, ‘I could die here.’ As soon as the road was clear we moved on. But that was the most frightening moment of my life.”

They were afraid, despite the fact that not one shot was fired. Yet, they responded to the need. They moved on.

I meet people like that on a very regular basis. Their lives may be in danger. They may be facing a disease that will surely kill them. They may be facing unemployment and cannot see how in the world they will provide for their families. They may be facing an abusive relationship. They are afraid. But they respond to the responsibilities before them. They move on.

If the threat of terrorism has immobilized this nation the terrorists have won, even if they never drop another shoe bomb, mail another anthrax letter, or fly another airplane into a building.

A soldier is trained how to deal with fear. Central to that training is the clarity of mission, confidence in their training and equipment, and total trust in the reliability of their comrades in arms.

Most of us do not receive that kind of training or have the experiences that re-enforce our confidence. Most of us will never be on the front lines like my son. But front lines are just that – they are the front

lines but not the only lines of conflict and struggle. In fact, the front lines will inevitably fall if the rear lines are inadequate. The threat of terrorism can never be settled by the military if the nation is frozen in fear. No amount of troop “surge” in Afghanistan will substitute for a strong Afghan government established in the hearts of the Afghan people.

We, too, are facing difficult and frightening times, not only in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also in the job market and the stock market. There are threats in the checkout line at the grocery store and the security line at the airport.

I would like to propose that there are sources in our lives that will secure the future of this nation. There are two pools from which we can draw the living waters of our republic. The first is the well of American democracy. The second is the power of love to overcome evil.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not proposing that we wave the flag and throw a “Hail Mary.” I believe there is and must be important distinctions between patriotism and authentic faith. The security of the American people does not depend of the return of prayer in the public schools or any of the other bogus solutions that palliative Christianity might offer.

The Psalmist urged the Israelites to be bold because God was with them. This did not mean that there would be no sacrifice, injury, or even death. It did mean, and still means, that there are eternal values that are the sustenance of any nation. I do not believe in or would ever hope for a theocracy. But I do believe that freedom is a gift from God. Behind American democracy, as expressed in our Constitution and Bill of Rights, stands the long theological tradition of God's command that no human knee shall ever bow to any person or power on the face of the earth.

Freedom is the condition of God. Our relationship with God can only be expressed in freedom, not coercion. Our relationship with one another can only be expressed in freedom, not tyranny. Terrorism has won if we abridge the freedoms that God calls us to. When men like Timothy McVeigh destroy another federal building; or men like the Unabomber Ted Kaczynski send another letter bomb; or men like Khalid Sheikh Mohammed plan another attack on an American city, let the free presses roll, let the people assemble and speak their minds, let the church bells ring, open the ballot boxes, guarantee due process and freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures. Whenever we abridge civil rights in the face of terror, freedom stumbles and tyranny prevails. Recall the words of the old hymn, "My Country, 'Tis of Thee:"

My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty of thee I sing...  
My native country thee, land of the noble free of thee I sing...  
Let music swell the breeze, and ring from all the trees sweet  
freedom's song...  
Our father's God to thee, author of liberty to thee we sing.

We can only defend against terrorism when the songs of freedom swell from our hearts, guide the work of Congress, and sustain America's judicial system. We can defend against terrorism if we are deeply poured into the foundation of democracy. With freedom as our stanchion the storms of tyranny may roil against us throughout the night. But when the sun rises on the lips of the morning we will awaken to the promised land of liberty. Every form of tyranny falls before the unconquerable demand for freedom in the human heart. God planted it there! It is God's will that every one of God's children be free people – everyone, no exceptions. God wills freedom for God's Jewish children, God's Buddhist children, God's Hindu children, God's Christian children, and God's Muslim children. God wills freedom for all the children who doubt or do not believe in God's freedom. God's message is the same throughout history: to Pharaoh, to Caesar the Augustus, to Adolf Hitler, to Stalin, to Pol Pot, to Idi Amin, and to Osama bin Laden – “Let my people go.”

We will annex terrorism with irrepressible freedom. We will baptize tyranny in the waters of God's love. By God's love I mean the



contagious and unstoppable soul force of God's justice – God's shalom – God's peace. There will be no peace in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, the Middle East or any other place on earth until everyone has food, shelter, medical care, education, meaningful employment, security, and universal human rights.

Yes, love is that concrete. Love is that relevant. Love is the living history of distributive justice. The Dalai Lama received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. In his acceptance speech he declared:

“The realization that we are all basically the same human beings, who seek happiness and try to avoid suffering is very helpful in developing a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood; a warm feeling of love and compassion for others... Peace, in the sense of the absence of war, is of little value to someone who is dying of hunger or cold. It will not remove the pain of torture inflicted on a prison of conscience. It does not comfort those who have lost their loved ones in floods cause by senseless deforestation in a neighboring country. Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where the people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free...”<sup>1</sup>

Thus Jesus said to Peter in John's gospel, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” (John 21:15)

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<sup>1</sup> The 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, *Nobel Lecture*, delivered December 11, 1989. <http://nobelprize.org>. Downloaded 2/6/2010.

It is that simple. It is that commanding. It is that necessary if we are ever to know security as a community, as a nation, as a world. That is the kind of love that dismantles the evils of greed and hatred. Such love washes the wounds of the world and heals human relationships. This is the perfect love that casts out fear.

I believe that faith is a bold trust in freedom and love. This is the armor of God that prepares us to meet the challenges of terrorism, natural disasters, and the fell happenstances of life. Recall the words of the old hymn, "O Brother Man, Fold to Thy Heart" by John Greenleaf Whittier:

O brother man, fold to thy heart thy brother,  
Where pity dwells, the peace of God is there.  
To worship rightly is to love each other.  
Each smile a hymn, each kindly deed a prayer.

Follow with reverent steps the great example  
Of him whose holy work was doing good.  
So shall the wide earth seem our Father's temple,  
Each loving life a psalm of gratitude.

Then shall all shackles fall: the storm clangor  
Of wild war music, o'er the earth shall cease;  
Love shall tread out the baleful fire of anger,  
And in its ashes plant the tree of peace.

*Finis*