Daily View

"But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today'" Hebrews 3:13

April 18, 2020

No matter how frightening life becomes, for those who love God, there's always a bow in the sky somewhere [Oahu, Hawaii]

Fear

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Psalm 27:1

How many times in your life have you been genuinely afraid? I don't mean "anxious" or "worried." That's another topic for another day. I mean genuinely *afraid*. When you are frightened, it takes over "all the rest of your insides" (as Huck Finn said, referring to conscience). You can't think of anything else. There seem to be many who are in a stare of fright due to the coronavirus and that's understandable. Seeing people on ventilators and all alone in those plastic-enshrouded rooms is scary.

I've had several truly frightening experiences in my life. Some of them came suddenly, like when a car ran a red light and stopped inches from my door. The fear hit me right after that — I would call it "*after*-fright." The fear builds as you start reflecting on what could have happened. In a similar experience, when we were in Waikiki in January, we were waiting on the curb for the light to change. When the walk sign came on, we stepped off the curb and, seeing a bus out of the corner of my eye, I pushed Christie back with my left hand just as the bus came speeding by, through the red light, hugging the curb. If she (or we) had stepped off as we normally would do, we would have been hit by the bus. I'm still shuddering from "after-fright" thinking about what might have been.

It seems, though, that most instances of fear are fear of the future, of what *might* happen. Scary movies are built on that theme. The threat of something terrible about to happen keeps us on the edge of our seats. Of course, there is also the fear you feel while in the middle of some frightful experience.

It's hard to say which kind of fear is worse: *fore*-fright, *after*-fright or *in-the-now*—fright. In the Army, toward the end of basic training, all of us knew there were some frightening training exercises on the schedule. One of the exercises required us to crawl 75 yards in soft dirt, under barbwire, as live machine gun fire buzzed over our heads (every few rounds were tracer rounds so we knew the bullets were real). If you panicked and stood up, you would be killed. That was mostly *fore*-fright; the anticipation of it was worse than the actual experience.

The Bible has a lot to say about fear but it seems to boil down to one main thing, when facing physical danger: "if you die, you go to heaven, and no one can take that away from you... so don't fear." The apostles demonstrated this in their determination to preach in the face of death (see Acts 4:19-20; 5:29; 21:13, to name just a few); that's what makes the end of Romans 8 so comforting — nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, not even death or the fear of death (which Jesus took away, according to Hebrews 2:14-15).

So fear is real. But I think it's safe to say that maturity in the faith can be defined by our attitude toward death. Though we fear the process, we don't fear the actual end. Polycarp (d. 186 AD) is a good example. Soldiers grabbed him to nail him to a stake, but Polycarp stopped them: *"Leave me as I am. For he who grants me to endure the fire will enable me also to remain on the pyre unmoved, without the security you desire from nails."* I'm still working on that, but I would like to have that attitude.