

Trust God as a Refuge

Romans 15:4c

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

There's a lot more fear around today than there used to be. Don't you think? There's just a lot more fear in the world and there's always been a good healthy fear that we've all had, that is necessary for self-preservation that makes you jump out of the way of an oncoming car, and just keep yourself safe. And then there's a good fear of God that we've all learned is the beginning of wisdom; it's respect for God, the Creator of the world.

But don't you think there's a new kind of fear among us now? I mean there's a new intensity of fear that all of us feel in some way in our own individual lives. It's interesting that Jesus of Nazareth, who is the son of the Creator of the universe, described that fear -- and actually he said it would begin to develop, as we move more and more towards the end of the world.

It's an interesting piece I'll show you loved ones, if you'd take a Bible and look at the gospel of Luke. Luke 21:25 and it really will startle you, when you see how Jesus put it because I think you'll think as I think. Yeah, that's what's beginning to happen now. Luke 21:25 "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken." And it's just hard not to rise in your mind and say, "I wondered, is he right here and describing it now as he sees it?" and he is, you know.

"Men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world," I don't know when it started for you? I think for many of us, it started in 1963, with the assassination of John F. Kennedy. I don't think it was the assassination itself that caused it, because the nation had lived through the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. But it seems that Kennedy's assassination started a whole series of events that began to make us all question the ability of the old accepted institutions to survive. You remember there was the assassination then of Martin Luther King, and then there was the assassination of Robert Kennedy, and several other assassinations probably abroad, that I'm not mentioning, right up until the assassination of Indira Gandhi. And somehow from that time, many of us began to realize, it's impossible to look upon the old certainties that we used to depend on as being there.

They just aren't there in the same way as they used to be. And it has actually come even closer to us with the more recent attempts, you remember, on Reagan's life, and of course who would ever have dreamed that that figure -- that looked as immovable as Gibraltar itself, the Pope of Rome -- would ever be shot. I mean it's unthinkable. We would never have dreamed it was possible. And then there are other certainties that have begun to shake. We've seen other institutions begin to crumble. We never imagined that a plant like Three Mile Island, a huge nuclear operation that required millions of dollars of investment, would actually have to be closed down in a state of dire emergency.

We never believed that Chrysler would have to be bailed out by loans from the government. We never believed that banks would begin to fail again. We never thought for a moment that these institutions that have always looked so certain and so stable, would begin to crumble at the foundations. And don't you think that it's not just those symbolic biggies that create a feeling of fear in us. But I mean it's -- you can almost pick any weekend now. It just so happens that this weekend is a more

obvious one, but we cannot be absolutely certain any longer that you go in and sit down in a plane, and you cannot be certain that the guy beside you, will not half way through the flight get up with a hand-grenade in one hand and a pistol in the other, and hijack the whole plane for the next week, killing some of the passengers, and you know that fine well.

I agree with you, we are all hoping that we'll never be in that situation but yet it begins to come into your inner consciousness that there is absolutely no reason, no reason on earth why that may not happen to you sometime. When it gets to the point of terrorists being able to hijack a cruise ship in which a group of Americans go off for a vacation, and one elderly man in a wheel chair ends up being murdered and thrown into the ocean. No wonder our hearts are beginning to fail us because of fear, because it's getting to the point where you hardly can find a stepping stone in the river that you can be sure of putting your weight on, without it wobbling underneath you. And so, there is I think in all of us now, an intensity of fear in our lives that there has never been before to the same extent.

And in this situation loved ones, this dear book has something to say and I'd ask you just to look at the verse we are studying today. It's Romans 15:4 and that would begin the study. Romans 15:4: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope." Now loved ones, our dear God, has supplied help for us, for every one of us here whose hearts fail us because of fear. "For whatever was written in former days," whatever was written in this book in former days "Was written for our instruction that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope."

Where does fear come from? Fear comes from trying to calculate the possibilities of your getting what you need from this hideously uncertain world, that's it. Fear comes from just trying to calculate, how on earth you are going to meet your needs and get through this life, secure and safe with all the uncertainties of this world around us, that's it. That's where fear comes. It's like a planet out in space, suddenly realizing that the fixed orbits of all the other planets in the universe are no longer fixed, they are no longer fixed, the certainties are no longer certain, the guidelines are no longer there, the assumptions that we made are no longer solid, we can no longer depend on certain people beside us in a plane acting in a certain way, or certain people when they see the President acting in a certain way. The orbits are no longer fixed.

It's like a little planet in the universe suddenly realizing, all the orbits are no longer fixed. And then can you imagine what that little star thinks, as it looks out there to shield itself from the sunlight? And it starts trying to think out, how am I going to get through all these without someone colliding with me? They're going in all directions. The little star goes bonkers with worry. It just does. It sits there and thinks, "Now wait a minute, which way will I move? I move -- well I don't know how he is going to move. He used to move in that orbit, but I don't. Well, I moved it. No, that guy, he used to -- but he's going a different way now." That poor planet goes crazy, goes insane, trying to calculate how to find its way through space, now that all the orbits are no longer fixed.

But that's what most of us do, that's what most of us have to do. Most of us have to start trying to calculate, now given the instability of this financial institution and given the unreliability of this political institution, and given the fact that this man's life is obviously unstable domestically and given the fact that a similar corporation to ours own went down -- how am I going each day to find my way through this life, without some of these people colliding and destroying me?

The killer is if you stand back and look at it, it's just because you haven't stood back and looked at it, but if you stand back and look at it, it's the mathematics of terror, it's the mathematics of terror. Because you have to start each day trying to assure yourself through logic and through mathematical reckoning that you are going to get through the day without some adverse circumstances destroying you.

And loved ones don't feel you're on your own. Most of us are doing the same thing that you are. We are all fairly aware that there are four billion other planets here on this earth, there are four billion other little human beings and they have all kinds of designs for their life and all kinds of designs on our life. And our job is to begin each day, trying to work out how we will avoid this colleague nailing us, or this loved one destroying us or this other institution falling on top of us. And it is really the mathematics of terror because there is actually no way to do that; and that's why many of us have twilight hours of anxiety.

Those twilight hours, when it's neither night or morning, and we are trying to go over and over in our minds, "All right, if I do that, he'll do that; if I do that, he'll do that; if I do that with my money, they'll probably do that; if I do that, they'll do that." And we just keep on and on, usually until we're just tired, we're just worn out. It's not that we come to a solution because there is no way in which you can mathematically prove to yourself, that they will not eventually get you, there's no way. There's no way in which you can prove to yourself mathematically, that they won't eventually get you. That eventually some adverse circumstance or some person or some institution will not eventually destroy your life and bring it into failure and defeat. But loved ones, those are the calculations that we're all involved in. All I'd like you to see clearly is, do you see it's a "no win" situation? I mean, can you see that? That there is no way by calculating and thinking that you can eliminate all possibilities of unpleasant, and in fact disastrous things happening to you in this present life, there isn't.

And all we're trying to do is cut down the possibilities but after we have tried our very best, and we've seen some other guy with more investments than we had, or we've seen some other woman with more health than we had, or we've seen some other family with greater advantages than we've had, and they've gone down. Then we begin to realize, wait a minute, there's no way in which I can win on this. And that's where fear comes from. I mean, fear is just desperation in the light of the fact that there's no way that you can guarantee or eliminate logically every possibility of adverse things happening to you and destroying you. And I would encourage you at least to stop doing that. I think there's an alternative to it. But at least stop doing that, because there's no peace that way, you'll never get peace.

You just can't insure it, you can't and you're only bluffing yourself when you think you have got to that point, because there is something else looming up on the horizon. That's what makes the fear all the more deadly, because actually, if I could say to you, some of you who are at school at the moment. As the years go by, the old mind just gets more and more clever at foreseeing more and more of the hideous accidents that could occur, and so the mathematics of terror do not get better, they get worse, because you can perceive more possibilities of more complicated things happening than you ever knew when you were at school.

And actually those of us who have lived a few years after school, we would testify to that. That actually the thing kind of tends to close down rather than open up. It tends to be the situation as it would be with the little planet. Eventually the little planet decides, my safest bet is to stay

in this little corner of the universe and just whip round and round in circles, and not go anywhere and actually, eventually you're driven to withdraw, withdraw and you keep building walls up until you end up like Howard Hughes with Kleenex and with guards around him in the top floor of a motel with nothing to do but be afraid of the bugs [diseases] that would get up to him. And that's the picture of one of the most powerful and wealthiest men in our world.

Eventually, loved ones, the logic of trying to ensure in your own mind that bad things will not happen to you because you've so guarded yourself in all ways, that logic eventually drives you to insanity. Actually, Schaeffer is right. If that's your only basis for life, there's nothing to prevent suicide, because eventually any man or woman who looks out of this hideous, unreliable world will decide, sooner or later it's going to come. So I may as well get out rather than suffer now. Is there any alternative? Yes, there is.

My grandmother lived in Belfast in Ireland and in about 1903 or 1905, found herself a widow with two little infant sons to bring up. One of them just had one leg, and in those days you know what an agony that was. She had two world wars ahead of her, a civil strife of the troubles in Ireland during the 1920's and then the General Depression in the 20's and 30's. And there was no social security. And she had a little barbershop that her young husband had just started a few years before he died. But she believed that verse that we read. She believed that whatever was written in times past was written for our instruction, that we might be able to receive encouragement and steadfastness from the scriptures. And so at each Saturday night, she would bring the little wooden box that she used, to take in the few shillings and pence that she made from cutting people's hair during the week, and she would bring in this little wooden box into the back parlor and she'd set it down there.

And then she turned from that world of guaranteed disasters that would be filled with fear, if she started to calculate the difficult things that she was going to meet that following week, because all she could be sure of was, she'd never make it. She turned away from that world of calculating and trying to persuade herself that certain thing could not happen to her. And she turned to a different world entirely. She took this Bible and I'll tell you where she looked. She looked at a Psalm, and it became the very rock on which she lived her life. Psalm 91 and she would read before she prayed over the money, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.' For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence."

She was not bearing the burden of having to be able to foresee everybody that would lay a trap for her, the snare of the fowler. She was free from having to be sure that she could outwit all her colleagues, or out think all her rivals. She felt certain that there was someone else who would deliver her from that kind of trap. In verse four, "He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night." And she didn't spend hours trying to go over the day and trying to foresee every eventuality that would occur, and trying to work out, how she would escape it. So, she had no need to fear the terror of the night.

That is a special terror, those of you who've had it. You aren't acting, you're lying in bed, and there's every opportunity for the powers of darkness to worry you and worry you to death as you start trying to think through the day. She didn't fear the terror of the night, because she didn't face any terror in the night, because she didn't worry about the next day, because she was absolutely convinced that this God was her rock and fortress and would protect her.

“Nor the arrow that flies by day,” she knew there would be arrows flying around her all through the day. She knew there were all kinds of events that would take place that could kill her in a moment. So, she could never get into a position where there weren’t arrows flying. But she knew that she need not fear them, because not one of them could touch her without permission from her Father, who loved her and cared for her.

So, she wasn’t caught in that logical impossibility of trying to prove that no arrow can hit me because I’ve got myself into an impregnable position. She was sure any arrow could hit her. Except that none could do it unless it was permitted by her dear Father who watched over her. “Nor the pestilence” in verse six “that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand; but it will not come near you.” That was a great deliverance.

I don’t know how you are, but you look at the people who are kind of like you, and you see the sort of thing that they’re doing or the sort of life that they’re living, or the sort of difficulties that they’re having, and then you conclude, you’ll probably face the same things. Except that you eternally are optimistic and you think, yes but there is a slight difference between me and them. And that’s the vital difference, so I’m sure I won’t endure the same catastrophe as they’ve endured. She was free from that. She thought there are plenty like me. I’m a widow, I’ve two little sons, I’ve a business that’s hardly worth calling a business, and the world is falling around us. There are plenty of people far stronger than me. There are plenty of people who have far more hope of getting through it than I have. But that doesn’t matter. A thousand may fall at my side and ten thousand on my right hand but it won’t come near me.

All kinds of things may happen to people who are far weaker than me, who are in far worse situations than me, but nothing will happen to me personally, that my Father does not allow to happen. That was a great deliverance. “You will only look with your eyes” in verse eight, “and see the recompense of the wicked.” Why? “Because you have made the Lord your refuge,” not your own logical elimination of every possibility of adversity.

“The Most High your habitation, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against the stone. You will tread on the lion and the adder.” You’ll actually do things that would normally bring disaster to you. “The young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.” Why? God says “Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him my salvation.”

She lived till she was 85, so it’s true. That was written for your instruction. That’s your God. Your God is saying those things to you. There is no peace of mind apart from his protection. There is no peace of mind that you can establish for yourself by guaranteeing in some way your financial security or your physical health or your emotional or domestic happiness or your professional success. There is just no way, loved ones. This crazy world will get you eventually. There is no guarantee that it won’t get it. You can’t guarantee that it won’t. I can’t guarantee that it will, but you can’t guarantee that it won’t. And that’s where the fear comes.

But your God knows your name. And he has counted the hairs on your head. And here’s what he says. He

says “you are my workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which I have prepared beforehand that you should walk in them and I intend to have you walk in them, if you will listen to me.” And your Father says to you this morning, you’re not just some crazy little planet trying to calculate all the ways in which you’ll keep clear of all the other chaotic planets colliding with you, you’re not. You’re my son. You’re my daughter. I put you here. I know your name. I’ve counted the hairs on your head and I’m going to give you a promise.

I’d like you to look at the promise because it’s so good. Its 1 Corinthians 10:13, “No temptation” and the Greek word is “trial”. “No trial has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted,” really it’s ‘tried’. “He will not let you be tried beyond your strength, but with the temptation” or the trial, “will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

That’s it. That’s why you can sleep in bed at night. Your dear Father cares about you. He hasn’t sent you down here to destroy you like an insect. He sent you down here to become like himself and he promises that he will be your rock and your fortress, and that you need not be afraid of the arrow that flies by day or the pestilence that wastes at noonday. You need not be afraid of the terror of the night, that he will send his angels and they will have charge over you and they will prevent any trial come upon you, above what you’re able to bear. And with the trial he will always provide a way of deliverance, that’s it, loved ones. That’s it.

It is possible to live in peace in this crazy world. But, here’s what you have to do. You have to put your faith in one or the other, you do. You may say to me, “Now Pastor I’ve heard some of those verses before and I’ve tried to believe that.” Well, the reason you haven’t been able to believe it is that you’ve been playing both ends against the middle. Some days, you do a bit of the mathematical calculation stuff. Some days you get up by the bed and you start thinking now, if I do that with that money and if I do that with that person, then I’ll be able to ensure that and then that will happen and – yeah, okay, good, got that organized.

Now this other one I can’t see it so clearly, so Lord I come upon you, I come to you for help in this desperate situation. The Lord sees you both times. He sees you both times. No, stop the shrewd stupid mathematical calculations. Stop it, just stop it. That’s just a way to torture yourself, it’s just a device that Satan has got us used to, us silly little human beings, in order to destroy any faith we have in God or in anything. Stop doing that.

There’s no way in which you can ensure security apart from God, there isn’t; this crazy world will get you, you can’t do it. Turn from that completely and begin to trust God. Begin to do what my grandmother did. Read Psalm 91 before you go to bed at night. And then begin to memorize some of it. And say, God is my rock and my fortress. I have no need to fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day.

Loved ones, you need to make a definite move on it. If you’ve heard God speaking to you this morning and you’re thinking, well that’s good, what you’ve said is good, I must start thinking that way. I guarantee you’ll be back on valium in a couple of week’s time. And you’ll be back here praying again, “Lord help me to have faith.” Don’t. You have to make a definite commitment.

You have to say to God, I do believe what you’ve said, that there will be no trial that will come upon me above what I’m able to bear and with every trial, you’ll make a way of deliverance for me. And Father I put myself into your hands and I relax back in whatever you see I’m able to endure. And

now I resolutely turn from trying to work angles anymore or trying to calculate the odds. I commit myself no longer to do that. And every time my mind begins to do it, I will stop it, and I will say that you are my rock and my fortress.

What I would suggest is if this is real to you, and you do need to make a start, then we should sing "Great is Thy Faithfulness". Maybe we haven't songbooks. But, if we have songbooks, we should sing it, and if I were you, I think come up, make a commitment to God and go back. But change you know, change. I would urge you to make a step. I would urge you to take a step, because you know it has such a grip on you that unless you break it this morning, you will be back in the old ways next week. So, I would encourage you loved ones as we sing this song "Great is Thy Faithfulness", I would encourage you just to come up, kneel at the altar, make a commitment, "Lord, no longer am I going to live in fear."