

“No Fear” Acts 8:26-40; John 15:1-8; I John 4:7-21; Psalm 22:25-31 5-14-06

On this Mother’s Day, most of us pause to remember the people in our lives who have had a major influence on us. We don’t always realize this, but mothers are often behind the way we see our world and the way we choose to accept and live life.

Years ago, having had a very good mother, I remember building a sermon all around the virtues of mothers. At the end of worship, one woman said to me, “I certainly did not have a mother like those you spoke of, I feel rather wistful.” This startled me a little bit, I guess it did not occur to me that there were some mothers who fell far short of being, well, motherly. I filed away this information for future Mother’s Days. I also reminded this woman that it was clear by her example, that we are never doomed to repeat the patterns in which we have been raised. I told her that in spite of what she did not have, she had become one of the most devoted mothers among us. She had raised children who had strength of character, who looked at others with accepting eyes, who always enjoyed being with her and who longed to move forward in life with little to no fear. She had encouraged wonderful traits in her children, especially the ability to move forward boldly into lives of their own.

The very best any mother or parent can do is to raise children to the point of being loving adults ready to be independent and to take on the world with strength and courage.

Have you ever plunged into something with absolutely no fear of what might be? Said “Yes” to a challenge that might be outside of your range of expertise? If so, you most likely had a strong example in your life that showed you how to handle these kinds of events. When we do things like this we sometimes feel ourselves trembling with a little fear later and wondering what it was we were thinking of when we agreed to take on a major project. Most of us manage to “screw our courage to the sticking point” and move ahead.

If we have deep within ourselves a sense of love, planted by positive influences, we can move through much of life with no fear. We know we will be sustained by ourselves, by others who care deeply for us, and by God. This morning’s scripture readings all underline the power of the love God revealed to us through Jesus and the love that lies within each of us, sometimes untapped, that will bear us up and along through life.

When we live life in fear we become shut off from the world. We feel we are not safe venturing out beyond a limited area. We forget that we are nourished and sustained by a holy vine that supports us as we branch out to bear good fruit. When we are able to live life in love we move beyond our safe parameters, perhaps even jump into a carriage with a stranger and explain what it is that makes life so valuable to us, as did Philip.

There have been people who have told me that love is a foreign entity to them, that there is “no such thing.” I have never been able to comprehend and process this type of thinking. I feel very sorry for those who think they become fools when they love and, therefore, keep themselves from letting go of the fear they may carry within.

Now, many have been hurt when they have loved too much. They have been used and taken advantage of in many ways. But, there are also many who, in spite of being injured, shrug it off and decide they will take a chance and love again.

Sometimes when we think of love we tend to dwell on the romantic aspects of it all and our focus is restricted to another person. This is not the kind of love to which our scriptures are pointing. Instead they are looking at the love we should feel for all our brothers and sisters in the world. The love that reminds us that everyone is human and needy and deserving of love. “Love makes the world go round” and takes us forward when we have the boldness to let ourselves go and open our arms and hearts and minds.

I have been reading a little book by Anne Lamott, a rather quirky author, but one I enjoy enormously. The present book is not a work of fiction but one that is autobiographical entitled, [Plan B Further Thoughts on Faith](#).

While contemplating the scriptures for this morning and reading and reflecting the past few days, I came across Lamott's story of a man named David Roche. David is a person who has moved through life, with strength and boldness because of love in spite of a deformity that might have kept him shut off from life.

Lamott tells us that he is a "monologist," an entertainer who practices his trade through the delivery of monologues, and the "pastor of the Church of 80% Sincerity." She recalls that they first met through a phone call during which they discussed God and David told her that he had a "facial deformity." She didn't think much of this until they met face to face.

In Lamott's words: "He was born with a huge benign tumor on the bottom left side of his face; surgeons tried to remove it when he was very young. In the process, they removed his lower lip, and then gave him such extensive radiation that the lower part of his face stopped growing and he was covered with plum-colored burns."

When she saw him perform for the first time she noticed that he came out on stage and let everyone get a good look at him. Then he "suggested" the audience "ask him, in a conversational tone and in unison, 'David, what happened to your face?'" He told those gathered his story and went on to mention that he had thought of forming a gang of the "coolest disfigured people in the world....to go places together, bowling or to the makeover counter at Macy's."

"People assume I had an awful childhood," he continued, "But I didn't. I was loved and esteemed by my parents. My face may be unique, but my experiences aren't. I believe they are universal."

"We with facial deformities are children of the dark," he said. "Our shadow is on the outside. And we can see in the dark: we can see you, we see you turn away, but one day we finally understand that you turn away not from our faces but from your own fears. From those things inside you that you think mark you as someone unlovable to your family, society and even to God."

Through living and learning in life David formed his church—within himself. It does not exist in space. About it he says, "We in the Church of Eighty Percent Sincerity do not believe in miracles....But we do believe that you have to stay alert, because good things happen. When God opens the door, you've got to put your foot in.....in the Church of 80 % Sincerity, everyone has come to understand that unconditional love is a reality, but with a shelf life of about eight to ten seconds. Instead of beating yourself up because you feel it only fleetingly, you should savor those moments when it appears." He also explains that "Eighty percent is about as good as it's going to get.So twenty percent of the time, you just get to be yourself."

This is a person who has managed to find his way in the world through a good sense of who he really is on the inside, through a sense of love for himself and for others and the knowledge that he has much to offer to enrich the perspective of life people have. He says he has "been forced to find his inner beauty." He has also been encouraged to find what it is about him that makes him of great value.

This is what we are asked to do for others whether we are mothers or fathers, brothers or sisters, aunts or uncles, friends or relatives. We are asked to help one another see and live life without fear through the eyes and hearts of love. We are asked to be bold in what we do as we spread and share the gospel of Christ through our lives and examples. If we love God, we must also love those with whom we come in contact every day. If we do not, then we do not truly love our Creator. The love we have for God, for ourselves and for all others, undergirds the way we venture forth in life and the way we touch and move people. To begin to move forward with no fear we must seek to move forward in love. Amen