

**When I was a kid in Catholic elementary school
we would go to confession every week during Lent.**

**Now, even if you weren't raised Catholic, you probably know what Confession is.
Confession...or Reconciliation as it now called...is a sacrament of forgiveness,
where a person tells their sins to a priest and receives God's forgiveness.
So essentially each priest was the voice of God....**

**Well, when I was a kid, we would stand in line for the confessional.
That famous 'box' where the priest...whom we kids considered to be the voice of God...
would sit on one side and there would be a screen that you could talk through,
But you could not see the priest's face and he couldn't see yours.**

**So, I remember as a kid, hoping that Sister would send me to the nice priest...
the one who wouldn't yell...sometimes I got lucky...sometimes I didn't.**

**I remember that if I got sent to Father Z's line...I was scared.
After I left Fr. Z's confessional, I was often nervous and feeling pretty crummy....
Confession did not at all help me feel more loved by God
nor did help to feel more loving towards others.**

**But If I was sent to Father A's line, I breathed a sigh of relief.
When I left Fr. Z's confessional I felt renewed and grateful.
and happy...like I got a second chance to know God's love
and a second chance to love other people.**

**In today's reading James, John and Peter go up the mountain with Jesus at his request.
Now, in Matthew's gospel, since Matthew was focusing on Jewish Christians, everyone
would know that when you went up the mountain...there was at least the hope, if not a very
good chance, that you would meet God.**

**So now James, John and Peter are there with Jesus and out of nowhere,
Jesus is suddenly shining like the sun!
His clothes are dazzling and his face is luminous.
and there standing with him, talking with him is Moses
the great Law giver to the Hebrew people and Elijah, their great prophet!**

**The implication for James, John and Peter was that Jesus stood in good company!
He must be ok! He must be the true Messiah...if Elijah and Moses are visiting with him....**

**So, at first James, John and Peter are thrilled and honored to be there!
They were not afraid.
They wanted this magnificent, holy experience to last...
They want to come back and remember and perhaps even experience the vision
over and over again.
and who would blame them?!**

**But then, just as suddenly a bright cloud overshadows them ...
when a cloud appears, God is there...**

**And the voice speaks:
“This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”
And when hearing this, the 3 apostles were struck down with fear....**

**People from the beginning of time have been afraid of God.
Some times we taught to be afraid...and ...it wasn't just Catholic priests
who instilled the fear of God...lots of religious people in all different traditions and
lots of parents have used the Fear of God to get kids
to do what they thought they ought to do:
Don't lie, don't disobey...don't cheat on your test in school:**

God is watching. God sees everything you do whether anyone is around or not.

God knows all the bad things you do, and if you die without saying that you are sorry for doing all those bad things ...well, it's not going to be the fast track to heaven....

Instilling the 'Fear of God' into children has been a method of control for ages... and a lot of the time, somewhat successful, at a certain level...

Unfortunately, doing the right thing because you God sees you and you're afraid of God punishing you, doesn't encourage kids to do the right thing because it is the right thing...

It really trains children to be sneaky and fearful and conniving...

It tempts some kids just to see how much they can get away with...

Instilling the 'Fear of God' into children does not help children to grow into the fullness of who God created them to be.

Instilling the 'Fear of God' into children does not help children become more compassionate or more kind, especially when no one is looking.

No...instilling the "Fear of God" into children just teaches kids to do the bare minimum that keeps them out of trouble!

But back to our reading...

But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid"

Jesus did that a lot.

He was always touching people who were beaten down by life, who were ridiculed by others, who were told they were worthless or sinful and he would always go to them, touch them and tell them to get up, to be healed.

Fear was NEVER a part of Jesus' healings...

never a part of his life or his interactions with people.

He constantly...constantly...tried to teach People that his Abba God...his Daddy...

did not judge them as sinful and worthless....

He desperately wanted them to understand how much his Abba God...his Daddy... loved them.

On the other hand, Jesus adamantly opposed any and all religious leaders who used fear and domination to keep people in line.

He was passionately against using Fear as a motivating source to keep people faithful to Yahweh....

Jesus knew that fear got you nowhere...

He knew that only Love would or could transform a hardened heart.

A lot of people have told me over the years, that they never liked the God of the Old Testament. That God was mean and vindictive...instead they would tell me they liked the God of Jesus who was seen as compassionate and forgiving.

Are there no 2 different Gods?

No....The God of the Old Testament is the God of Jesus...

But humanity never really understood God rightly until

we were shown how Yahweh loves

in and through the life the Jesus...

Today, we mark the second Sunday of Lent....

and let me say clearly....Fear has no place in our Lenten observances...

Perhaps it is Fear most of all that we need to Fast from

I've begun to think that most, if not all,

of the harm that people do to each other is fear based.

We steal because we are afraid we won't have enough of ...whatever.

We lie because we are afraid we aren't enough...

We hurt others because we are afraid they don't love us enough....

**I was once told that "Do not be afraid" or some variation thereof is mentioned 365x in the Bible....I have never checked that out to see if it is literally true or not...
but I'll buy it!**

Perhaps this week we might spend time pondering,

deeply pondering what we might be afraid of...

and then perhaps we can imagine Jesus saying to each of us:

'Get up and do not be afraid'.

**You know, it is good to reflect upon and regret the harm we have done,
it is just to make amends when we can...**

It is emotionally and spiritually healthy to seek forgiveness.

But no religious leader has the right to make you feel afraid of God...

for Jesus himself tells us all: Get up and do not be afraid! Amen.