

# The Epidemic of Fear

*by David Haberstock*

There is an epidemic of fear these days. It's understandable given all the uncertainty we are facing and the challenges we've been wending our way through. Fear abounds. And it cuts both ways. There are those afraid of getting sick in the pandemic. There are also those afraid of what we are doing to ourselves and our society in trying to deal with this pandemic. But both ways there is fear. You might identify with one side more than the other, but I suspect you have a high degree of fear and concern these days.

Fear has a purpose. It makes you sit up and take notice of danger. There are many dangers surrounding us every day. You need to be careful when walking in danger. Too much fear paralyzes you and keeps you from moving forward when your life may depend on it. Fear also gives rise to anger and hatred, which can lead to all manner of sin.

The answer to fear is love, for love is the opposite of fear. Or, as St. John says, "there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). Love combats fear. And St. John tells us, "we have come to know and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 John 4:16).

God loves you. You know this to be true, for He has claimed you as His own, placing His name on you in Holy Baptism. Christ our Lord has purchased you from sin, death, and Satan with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death so that you might be His and live under Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

As a Christian you abide each day in His love. Sin, Satan, and the world seek to rob you of this knowledge and cause you to fear everything but Him who is your salvation (Matthew 10:28). In general, daily Bible reading and prayer is a good tonic for the fears of the world that assail us. Bible reading reminds us of Him and pours His love into us and we cast our cares on Him in prayer. But at a time of increased fear, like our present age, you may need more powerful medicine.

Love casts **out fear**. But how do you get a big dose of love? Certainly, you can hug your loved ones and declare aloud as much as possible that you love them. But the Love of God is what is truly needed to cast out fear in your life. The most powerful way to receive His love and comfort for you is by confessing your fears. You can do so in your daily prayers, but there is no more powerful way to receive the love of Christ that casts out fear than through private confession and absolution, which applies the peace and comfort of Christ's salvation to you personally, and after that to quickly receive the very presence of your loving Saviour in His Body and Blood.

Being filled with the Love of Christ that casts out the spirit of fear, we can then be bold to love our enemies. Fear causes us to view even family members or friends with whom we differ as enemies, whereas love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). So, when Christ our loving Saviour tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44), He is giving us incredible wisdom. Imagine inviting your enemy over for a meal and lovingly preparing

it for them all day, as you might for your own family on Christmas, and then spending hours with them at table breaking bread together and enjoying good wine. How can that not soften your heart or theirs?

Well, Christ has done you one better, when He prepared a table for you in the presence of your enemies (Psalm 23:6). In our natural state you and I are enemies of God, but He prepared the cup of salvation for you, pouring out His blood on the cross, and feeding you His body and blood from the altar, thus making enemies into His beloved friends.

Christ Jesus, cast out our fears with your perfect love for us so that we might live in you in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. Amen.

-----

**Rev. David Haberstock** is Regional Pastor for Lutheran Church–Canada’s Central Region.