

Editorial: Fear not. You've been given power, love and self-control.

October 29, 2020

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and self-control” (2 Timothy 1:7).

I grew up in the church and learned that verse early. I heard it countless times. In fact, I heard it so many times it sort of lost its ... power.

My son and I are reading through the Bible together on the Bible app his youth group uses. It's a way for us to do something together. Second Timothy 1 was the New Testament reading this morning, following on the heels of Jeremiah 20-22.

Reading 2 Timothy 1:7 this morning in the context of what is happening around us now was enough to make me stop and think about the words again.

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and self-control.”

Isn't this what we need now—the power, love and self-control of God's Spirit?

Fear not.

Fear is around every corner these days. Whether it's COVID-19, politics and the election, race and our community, or the economy and our finances, fear is knocking at the door. To make matters worse, these

individual sources of concern are swirled together into something of a perfect storm—as if the literal storms frequenting the Gulf Coast this year weren't enough.

In the midst of these fearsome days, we need to hear, “Fear not.” And we need to hear it from the right source: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear.”

The medical, social, political and economic challenges facing us need to be taken seriously. They are fearsome; let's not kid ourselves. They're not going to just disappear; they're not going to go away on their own. We must look them squarely in the eye; we must face them. But how?

Power, love and self-control

We would do well to remember the context of Paul's words to Timothy, which are included in what we think is Paul's second and final letter to him. Paul was near the end of his life and seemed to know it. He and Timothy lived in a place and time when following Jesus and proclaiming him Lord was unpopular and even dangerous.

In light of what Paul was suffering and what he expected Timothy to face, Paul wrote, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and self-control.”

To meet the fearsomeness of our own time, God's Spirit in us is power, love and self-control. Imagine the power of that mixture up against the swirling storm we are in.

God's power, love and self-control are the same exercised in the creation; in the centuries of Israel's captivity to Egypt, as much as in God's freeing them from the same; in God's longsuffering with Israel and Judah during their long apostasy; in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus; and

in the birth and growth of the church, as well as in its many trials and tribulations.

Jesus Christ—the embodiment of love—set aside the advantage of divinity and made himself a nothing in this world. Even sitting on an earthly throne would have been sufficient humiliation for him, but he took on the life of a servant, a washer of feet. It is his Spirit in us.

When fear confronted Jesus in the form of religion, government, culture and death, Jesus considered each, not as a trivial thing, but in measured seriousness. He could have called all of heaven to do his will, but he refrained in obedience to God’s will. It is that Spirit of self-control that is in us.

What are we to do?

The world would tell us to power through; just power through. The world would have us believe we have to face our fears under our own ability—following our heart, feelings or reason. God created us with emotions, the ability to think and a will, not to be driven by them, but as a means of reflecting God in this world.

Our hearts and feelings are like the rising and falling of ocean waves driven by other winds. The power of our reason is ephemeral, steered by so little as how well we sleep and eat. Amid our uncertainties, these integral parts of ourselves find their anchor in God’s Spirit.

Political power can be voted in and voted out. Economic power can collapse. Disease takes its toll—and a heavy toll it can be—but not without limit. No earthly power endures forever. Nor will any free us from fear completely. On the contrary, they each can bring renewed fear.

There is another power—infinite and eternal—the Spirit of God who does

not make the causes of fear simply disappear, but over whom those causes hold no power.

The world's love is conditional, fickle, fatigable. Christ's love is unconditional, dogged, sound, eternal. In love, Christ gave up privilege and took on pain, gave up honor and took on humiliation.

Christ's kind of love is born into a world gone mad and lived between a rock and a hard place. To love like Christ looks to the world like walking backward in the dark.

The spirit of our age tosses the world to and fro, frantically searching for control. The Spirit of God does not need to search for control, but possesses it.

In response to the power, love and controlling forces of this world, we must order our ways by the power, love and self-control of God's Spirit.

As mad as the world has gone, we've been given everything we need to face it. We've been given power, love and self-control. What's more, God's Spirit empowers and enables us to bring it all to bear on the seriousness of these days.

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