
Love Casts Out All Fear

**A sermon by the Rev. Salmoon Bashir
The Fifth Sunday of Easter – Year B**

For God is Love and Love casts out all fear! This morning, I bring you two different stories – one is from last year and the other one from my college days. Both of these stories are about God and Love and that Love casts out all fear. Won't you join me on this journey of Love this morning.

Story Number One:

Last year around Christmas time my mother-in-law was visiting us from the other Georgia. My wife and I went to pick her up from the Atlanta airport international terminal. Everything seemed the same, usual like always, but I suddenly started seeing something beautiful in the ordinary. We had to wait for about an hour for my mother-in-law to come out and in the meantime, I watched people anxiously waiting for their loved ones rushing towards them the moment they came out of the arrival terminal.

I witnessed the overwhelming emotions, tears and enormous amount of love in that one hour. Love was overflowing from parents to their children, grandparents to their grandchildren, love between spouses and romantic partners, friends to their friends and in every possible human relationship I can think of. This experience brought me so much joy and also tears. The raw emotions of love. And I know many of you are probably remembering the 2003 Christmas movie *Love Actually* and you are right. As I was seeing the overflowing love and emotions all around that place, it was true for me that no matter the state of the world, Love actually is all around us. It also made me think that maybe the Airport is a place where for a moment nothing else matters and people rush to express the raw love after terribly missing their loved ones. The kind of love which brings people together.

How about the kind of love which makes us uneasy sometimes, when love is the last thing that we want to do, when even the thought of it enrages us, and then love which tears and breaks down barriers between "US and Them."

The love where you see God because God is Love and that love casts our fear. If we have God in our lives who casts our fear, in other words if we have love in our lives that love can cast out fear. The Love which will survive and even thrive through thunderstorms and hurricanes. That is the kind of love I am talking about this morning. When fear consumes our mind, love becomes our answer, and when fear of punishment takes over your judgment, love is the answer, love is the way.

The author of John uses the word Beloved, in Greek *Agapétos*, beloved, divinely-loved-ones, personally experiencing God's agapē-love. So, Beloved, there are times in life when love is the last thing that we want to do but if we do it, if we push through those times, choose love over hate, choose love over envy, choose love over jealousy, choose love over evil – this means choosing God over evil, and such Love will cast out all fears. Love casts out all fear because the source of such love is true God.

In today's epistle, the word used for 'cast out' is the same word the gospel writers used to tell stories of Jesus casting out, driving out demons. Love driving out fear is described in the same words as Jesus casting out demons. Beloved, fear is natural for humans but being recipients of true love as a gift from God, it casts out fear. Because the source of that Love is God and where God is, there is no fear. And when that fear is gone then we can be made perfect in loving each other, we can extend the radical love to the lost, least and the last. Because Jesus made Love perfect by loving us first.

Story Number Two:

I'd like to share the story number two which is very personal to me: I have many challenging stories from Pakistan, but today's story is not one of them. Previously in some of my personal stories I mentioned that when I moved to college, I was the only Christian student among thousands of others in my class. My roommate was a devout Muslim. On the first Friday after we started our classes, he asked me to go for Friday prayer with him and that was the first time I told him that I was a Christian. It was a huge surprise for him. It was the first time ever he was seeing a Christian person in the flesh in his life.

He used to call his grandmother almost every other day and during one of those calls, she asked him about his roommate. My friend just told her I was from Lahore, which is quite a big city in Pakistan. She said to him 'isn't it great you can visit him even after finishing your college.' Then she asked him: "Does your roommate pray five times a day or at least on Fridays?" My friend told her: "Well, grandma, he is a Christian." **"Oh No!** What have you done!" – his grandmother told him, "You need to change your room immediately!" He said: "Grandma, I am not going to do that. He is my friend, and we have already built great friendship with each other."

Now, my brother gave me a beautiful painting of Psalm 46 that I hung on the wall instead of the cross in my dorm room. It said *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear!"* I used to pray under these words every day.

I grew up in a culture where we used to sit or kneel on the carpet, on the floor to pray as a family or even in the Church.

My roommate used to start his day with the first prayer around 5am. He had a prayer rug, a very sacred object for Muslims which had a Macca painting on it. I used to wake up early in the morning after him and kneel on the concrete floor, starting my day by reading and praying with Psalms. After a few days he saw me that I was sitting on the floor praying without any carpet or rug, and what happened next really amazed me. The next day after he offered his first prayer of the day early in the morning, he left his prayer rug instead of folding it and putting it away. I was surprised and asked him: "Did you forget to fold your prayer rug?" and I started folding it. He said to me, "No, that is for you to use during your prayer time in the morning." It surprised me and I told him: "Thank you so much, but I cannot accept it. If somebody else knows that I am using this prayer rug where I am not supposed to sit it will cause problems not only for me but for you as well."

He said to me: "Salmoon, I will take care of it if something like this happens to you or me."

Since then, every day early in the morning after he offered his first prayer of the day, he always left his prayer rug for me instead of folding it back, so when I woke up, I could pray on it. That continued as long as we lived in that room. That was the time when I realized what it means for Love to cast out fear. When we have God in our lives it casts out all fear. After that every Sunday morning he was waking me up by saying "I think it's time for you to go to the church" and on Fridays I was telling him to go to the mosque because Friday was a Holy day for him. True relationships, true Love, true friendship cast out fear of the unknown, for of the otherness and for of the different!

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. The manifestation of God's love for us happens when God is present in all our relationships, whether that expression of love is at the airport or sharing your prayer rug with your neighbor who is different from you.

God is love. If God is there in our relationship, it means Love is there. Only through love we can honor the majesty of God. Beloved, may we share our prayers and rugs and spaces and lives to love those who are also called the Children of God because God is Love and Love casts out fear.

Let me offer these words of Saint Francis of Assisi:

God came to my house and asked for charity.
And I fell on my knees and cried,
'Beloved, what may I give?'
'Just love,' He said.
'Just love.' [\[1\]](#)

[1] <https://onetrue.name.com/francis.htm>

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