

Why aren't you smiling?

I don't mean just right now, of course, maybe you are. But you probably don't spend your whole day looking like that, right? In fact, those of us with good German heritage know we probably shouldn't smile all day long, it's not good for you to show that much emotion all the time (for some reason). But let's be honest, beyond just a stigma of showing our emotions, there's lots of things in our lives that exist to steal that smile off our faces if we happen to be wearing one. There are lots of things that worry us, that intimidate us, or just outright make us afraid. Things that we just don't think we can smile through.

Of course, there's plenty in life that bring the smiles too, isn't there? There are people we care about, things we know, places we can go that when we think about them, we just can't help but have the corners of our mouths lifted up and have ourselves filled with a hope and joy that can't be contained. It would be nice if that were all there was; if the valleys of fear never came back. But our lives always seem to waffle back and forth and we can't keep that smile going.

There really is a solution to this, you know. And it's found at the mountaintop with Jesus, Peter, James and John: <Read text: Mark 9:2-9>.

Peter was frightened. He was so frightened he didn't really even know what he was saying. And he had every right to be frightened. Even from a human point of view this was well outside the realm of our normal experience. He didn't know how to handle this because he'd never encountered anything like this before. Peter was seeing the glory of God face-to-face and he just didn't know how to react.

But seeing God fully goes even beyond that, and Peter's reaction brings up a good point for us. This sight is exactly what we ought to be afraid of. Not the miserable little fears and worries that dominate our days and steal our happiness. Those are tiny. Those are temporary. Even the earthly "big" ones are nothing to compare to what we ought to be afraid of. Like me, for example. I am terrified of tornados. Never actually been in or around one, but I am terrified of them. Something about an unstoppable force of destruction looming at you from the horizon, barreling down on you with no hope of getting out of its path. That makes me afraid at my core in a way that no amount of logic or reason can put down.

But that's still nothing. Not to what we ought to be afraid of. Jesus himself told us what to fear when he said, "**Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.**" (Mt 10:28). The "One" mentioned here is God. Only God has the authority to separate you from himself forever. Only God has the authority to condemn you to hell. We tend to think of the devil as the enemy, and as Christians, that's true. But the devil's goal is simply to see you sent to hell, it is not his will or decision that makes it happen. By nature we are enemies of God. That holy God that showed forth his glory and splendor on the mount of Transfiguration.

It's worse than a force of nature bearing down on you from a distance. There is a Holy God bearing down on you. And his holiness cannot tolerate the least bit of corruption, of evil. Not even a spot. And you are covered in it. Your selfishness, your greed, your worry, your pride, your ego. All of it covers you like filth. It may not show so well in the dark of this world, but it's going to be pretty obvious when the light of God himself shines on you. And the force of that light burns away evil. Those covered in sin when God shines on them will be burned up and destroyed forever. That's what you ought to fear. That's what you ought to be absolutely terrified of. You will see God face to face and you will have to answer for all that you are.

And that would be the case, if it were not for what happened next. When the voice of the Father thundered out of the cloud: "**This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!**" (v7). And when we do, when we listen to this shining, glorious, powerful God, that is when our terror vanishes and is replaced completely by hope.

That was the point of this exercise for the disciples after all. Jesus had told them a number of things that were meant to give them hope and comfort in the Lenten days ahead. He told them what would happen. He told them why it had to happen. He told them that it would end well. And now look, this is who made those promises. This shining God, full of glory, unstoppable in might. Who could stand against him? What promise could he ever fail to deliver on? If this beacon of light ever looked beaten or downtrodden, it could only be because he allowed it to happen for some greater purpose.

That was the point, but the disciples by and large missed it. We know that they feared and lost hope in the days ahead. We know that they fled and cowered. We like to think that was pretty foolish of them, but let's remember that we have the benefit of knowing exactly how it worked out. It's one thing to know how God delivers on his promise, it's

another thing to trust it completely when it seems impossible for him to deliver on. And so rather than beat on the disciples for failing to put their hope in the transfigured Lord, let's look to the promises of our Lord Jesus. Let's listen to him as our Father commanded us and with every promise look to the glory he showed us at this mountain.

And let's start with the most important. We could pick a dozen examples, where Jesus says something like this: **"...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."** (Mt 20:28). That is why he came, and in that simple statement the fear and terror does vanish. The crimes we committed caused a debt in justice and it is that debt that Jesus came to pay. In him our payment is made and God will not pursue us for that debt any longer.

But there's more than just being released from the terror of God. Jesus promises that, **"Because I live, you also will live."** (Jn 14:19). Jesus' resurrection after his death is a promise to us that the same will happen to us. How many of the worries of the world stem from the end of our lives? The quality of life we have until then? How long we can squeeze out of this life? But those things don't have to concern us. We will live on forever.

And not just any old life either. That same Jesus promised that, **"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."** (Jn 14:2,3). We will be with our God. And the time we go there is when the time is exactly right. Jesus bought us a place in heaven with his blood. With his life he showed us what we will have at the end, and now he prepares a place for each one of us in heaven. And when the time is right, when that place is ready, he will come and take us to be with him forever. There is no need to fear when this life will end because when it ends will be exactly the right time. It's when God is ready.

And we are not left alone like orphans in the meantime. Jesus said, **"...surely I am with you always,"** (Mt 28:20). The God who shone with such majesty on that mountaintop, who loved you enough to die in your place, he is here with you every step of your life. He lived a human life, he knows your aches and pains, he knows human suffering firsthand. He is with you in his almighty power and we know that he is using that authority to guide you to him to that promised eternal rest.

And is there anything left to fear and worry about in the meantime? Our glorious God put it best: **"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"**

**"Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."** (Lk 12:22-32).

Brothers and sisters this only scratches the surface of the promises and assurances that our God gives us. Each one fills us with a joy, a comfort and a hope that the world cannot match, cannot understand and cannot knock down. If you want to banish your fear and worry and instead be filled with hope, then know the promises of your God. Study them regularly. And then look to the mountain to see the one who promised them. Shining forth in all his glory. We may not yet see how he delivers on them, but how could that God fail any of them? Don't be like the disciples who lost hope because they couldn't see the outcome. Trust that God simply is faithful in everything he promises.

And let that trust fill you with hope and joy in this world. The Christian who knows and trusts the promises of God is an eternal optimist, because eternity is assured. There is no reason to look downcast or worried, fearful or disappointed. There is only hope and joy. We do our God a disservice by not showing that joy in our lives. If we look stern and sullen all the time, if all our conversation is filled with gripes and complaints and criticisms, why should anyone think our God is worth anything? If moment to moment we behave like the rest who have no hope, then how will they know we have something better to offer them?

So why aren't you smiling? We have eternal hope. We have hope and comfort here and now. We look back always to the promises and we look to the one who promised. We remember him, shining forth in that glory at his transfiguration, because that is an image he wants us to remember. To give us hope in the dark days. If that God is caring for us, providing for us now and eternally, what valley of despair can there be? Remember the true promises of our God, let them banish the terror and fill you with hope. Amen.