

# The Homily on the Sunday of the Parish Meeting

The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany. Year B, RCL. Psalm 111. January 28, 2018. Trinity Episcopal Church, Alliance, Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

“The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (Psalm 111, verse 10)

The fear of the Lord: a fine old Biblical expression. We are well taught, in the Christian tradition, that the fear of the Lord ought to be understood as awe and respect, rather than terror and trepidation.

But anxiety in the face of the high, the mighty and the ultimate—that is completely understandable. And embarrassment, guilt, worry, shame, when comparing our fallibility and our shortfalls against the standards of an utterly just Creator—that is totally understandable as well.

God isn't just the biggest entity around; he's the most righteous.

So occasional self-abasement as we consider God's enormous power and goodness makes sense.

But...

If the *fear* of the Lord is the *beginning* of wisdom... then I think we have to say that the *love* of the Lord is the *end* of wisdom: the final goal of wisdom, the completion or perfection of wisdom.

Because the Lord God Almighty, that vast entity, that repository and expression of all moral and esthetic perfections, is also *merciful*. Verses three and four of Psalm 130 have this to say: “If you, Lord were to note what is done amiss, O Lord, who could stand? For there is forgiveness with you; therefore you shall be feared.”

God, you are merciful; *therefore* we hold you in awe.

How interesting! It is *because* God is merciful, willing to forgive, willing to be reconciled with his sinful creatures, that he is worthy of the honor, the respect, the awe that are at the heart of what the Bible means when it recommends that we fear him. Something in us—gratitude, respect for generosity, hope for a better relationship—something responds to God’s mercy: responds not only with “Whew! I dodged *that* bullet!” but also responds, more deeply, with “This isn’t just power; this isn’t just righteousness; this isn’t just cold, diamond-hard perfection: this is *love*.”

Yup. That’s what it is, all right.

That’s why we’re here. That’s why the work of the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ goes forward. Because God is not just majestic glory but generous goodness, not just lofty righteousness but gentle compassion, not just the searing light of raw power but the gentle glow of fatherly, brotherly, sisterly, friendly affection.

We treat each other, we treat the universe (as far as we can get at it), and we treat God... pretty shabbily, at times. But God says to us, “You’re worth whatever it takes to convince you that I love you more than I love my own honor, my own dignity, my own peace.”

Whatever it takes...

What it took was God’s revelation of himself in human form. Followed by the execution of God himself by torture. Followed, after just enough delay for the enormity of it all to sink in, by resurrection. Followed by the realization that God accepted this so that we, spiritual terrorists that we all too often are, could have new life. An unjust crucifixion, accepted in mercy by the Perfection of Justice Himself.

The cross of Jesus Christ has convinced me God is telling us the truth about how highly he values us and what he is willing to do about it. It has convinced me that the Bible is presenting a true picture of the God who is not only vast but generous, not only commanding but compassionate, not only perfect but patient, not only just but joyful, not only glorious but comforting, encouraging, companionable, loyal, longsuffering, gentle and good-humored.

This awesome God is worth the effort it takes us to love him, love one another, and

serve his creation on this planet, in this parish, on this day and always.