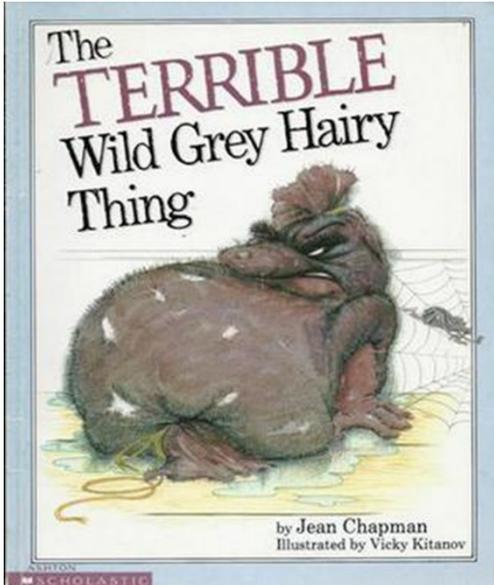


Easter VI Sunday 17 May 2020

Readings: Acts 17:22-31; Ps.66:8-20; 1 Pet.3:13-22; John 14:15-21

Reflection

I well remember, as a young mum, reading my children a wonderfully illustrated and graphic book called *The Terrible, Wild Grey Hairy Thing*. My children *loved* it, especially



if they were snuggled in close to me - as close as they could physically get - safe from danger. The fanciful story was all about an old sausage. This particular sausage, having rolled off a kitchen bench and become wedged behind a cupboard for many weeks, had morphed into a bloated, putrid, fungous-coated, ominously slouching, monster-like being. With great fear and trepidation, *The Terrible, Wild Grey Hairy Thing* was tentatively approached, prodded and growled at until eventually, its true identity was

discovered! As the story reached its climax, the tense, adrenalin-pumped bodies of my littlies would lean against me, very still for a moment, and then plead '*Read it again?*'

'Do not fear what they fear' – these are the words that jumped out at me as I prayerfully read through the riches of today's scriptures: '*Do not fear what they fear*'. These words come from Peter's letter to the early Gentile church. But who are '*they*' and what is fear? Well fear can be described as *the feeling or condition of being afraid; a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain etc., whether the threat is real or imagined*. Even the Church could be implicated for promoting fear-based theology at certain times in its evolution. Fear can be a paralysing emotion. I recall waking from nightmares as a child and lying paralysed in the dark, too terrified to move a muscle. (It's a wonder my children didn't do the same!)

But as adults, we *also* can be emotionally paralysed by fear - fear of discrimination, injury or accident, social stigma or embarrassment; fear of Coronavirus-infection, fear of

death and dying... a theologically unhelpful fear of God's judgement. *'Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated'* writes the apostle. The '*they*' referred to are those who 'do evil', those who do not follow God's commandments of Love. Earlier in the chapter, Peter instructs wives to *'do what is good and never let fears alarm you'*.

Fear *can* be healthy and keep us out of danger (saving us from falling over cliffs or stepping in front of a bus!) but living our lives from a fear perspective inhibits our ability to grow into the unique person God calls us to be. In the first letter of John we read:

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. (1 John 4:18)

'Fear not', 'Do not be afraid' or similar phrases purportedly occur in the Bible 365 times (one for every day of the year!). Whether this is truly accurate or not, the exhortation to *fear not* is woven like a golden thread throughout all of scripture – from Genesis to Revelation - and is particularly on Jesus' lips. If we were to read on just six verses from today's gospel reading in the fourteenth chapter of John, we would hear Jesus saying: *Peace I leave you; my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

And how could we not heed those words, following Jesus' words of assurance:

...the Father will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, ... You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

18 'I will not leave you orphaned... because I live, you also will live... I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

What longing we may feel, for the fullness of Christ's presence within - the mystery that enlivens us through Word and Sacrament, especially as we receive Holy Communion (how we look forward to sharing this face to face again, soon) - and the abiding Spirit of truth affirms that presence within us.

You may recall from last week that the first letter of Peter speaks words of guidance, encouragement and affirmation to the early Gentile church – the exiles of the dispersion, Spirit-filled followers of Christ. Peter's letter continues with encouragement:

¹⁵but in your hearts sanctify (or set apart) Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; ¹⁶yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

To conclude, I'd like to share with you another TomFoolery YouTube clip – this one entitled 'A Tale of Two Mindsets' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hszo9Slz5YY>

How would you account for the hope that is in you at this time in your life?

How would you account for the hope that is in you as we live through Covid-19?

Do the words 'Do not fear' settle your mind, soothe your heart and sit well on your soul?

I pray that it may it be so. Amen.

Helen Roud