

<sup>9</sup> As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

<sup>12</sup> "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup> No longer do I call you servants,<sup>[a]</sup> for the servant<sup>[b]</sup> does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. <sup>17</sup> These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

"In the beginning, we were both storyteller and 'storylistener.' In the end we will be both storyteller and storylistener. Right now, we are both storyteller and storylistener. "i

**We are constantly telling ourselves a story about WHO WE ARE.**

Another story we constantly tell ourselves is **WHO WE SHOULD BE.**

And one of the stories most of us have been told – from some point in our religious life – is the story that we should **FEAR THE LORD.**

In his next to last book "Christ Places in Ten Thousand Places," writer and Bible translator Eugene Peterson says that "Fear of the Lord" is so very misunderstood because people tend to think of it as "Fear + of + the + Lord" and then look of the definitions of "Fear" and then "Lord" and think they have it. It's about God and it's about being afraid.

Rather – Peterson teaches – we ought think of it as a word standing on its own – FEAROFTHELORD. The words "awe" and "reverence" come closer, but still don't quite capture it. It has its own very special meaning.

In his book "The Contemplative Life"" John Keating weighs in on this same subject. He says that Fear has two physiological responses, namely : FLIGHT or FIGHT. That's what the adrenaline system – created, indeed, by the Lord God who made us all – does for us. When we are afraid, our bodies are supercharged to do one of two things: we will FIGHT or we will FLEE.

In talking to a clinical director of five mental health systems in northern Virginia this past week, and talking about my upcoming sermon today, he corrected me. He told me that there is new research coming out that says an additional response to Fear is FREEZE. See the bear in the words and FREEZE. He told me that the research is particularly focused on children – how frightening experiences in life can cause them to freeze, to lock up, to shut down.

Fear of the Lord – it's one of the story lines we have heard if we have grown up in the church.

But how do we interpret it – erroneously, as Peterson said?

And does that fear based understanding cause us to fight, flee or freeze up when it comes to God?

Do you really think that's what God wants for relationship?

Jesus came to straighten out some of the stories we've heard and repeat to ourselves.

Jesus introduced a new "F" word – not fear, fight, flight, or freeze. Jesus' "F" word is FRIEND.

And FRIEND is inconsistent with fear, fight, flight, and freeze.

As Jesus begins to unpack this new relationship of friendship, he lifts up two characteristics:

(1) bearing fruit

(2) love – both receiving it and giving it

Let me talk about the last one first. LOVE is such a difficult concept in our culture today. It is used more often as a subject for music than perhaps any other. And it's one that we celebrate today on Mother's Day.

But real self-giving, hoping for the best in people, love is tough.

1 John tells us that **we love because God first loved us.**

**We can't receive that love, until we get over the notion that we are supposed to live in fear of God.**

But when we begin to live in FRIENDSHIP with God, we can begin to know just how wonderful is that love.

Once we RECEIVE, the nature of love compels us to GIVE IT AWAY.

In today's culture both receiving and giving love are tough, but they FEED on each other. The more we receive from God, the more we want to give away. The more we give it away, the more we want to receive from God.

And THAT changes the way we live our lives, the story that we tell ourselves and to which we listen.

[story of L---W----]

Now, back to that first characteristic of Friendship – bearing fruit.

It's time for us to take care of this business.

I have had enough!

I have had enough being embarrassed by how some people are telling the story of what God is all about.

I am sick and tired of God being embarrassed by people claiming to be Christian and preaching the BAD news of judgmentalism – all according to their standards, their beliefs.

God is about LOVE not FEAR.

God says that Judgment is not allowed for ANY OF US. Jesus said so, with His own lips.

And I'm tired of us Christians who believe in a loving God, who does not want us to judge – SITTING BACK AND MERELY MOANING ABOUT IT.

My sisters and brothers, it's time we enjoy the friendship of our brother Jesus by bearing some fruit.

It's time to take off our bibs and put on our aprons.

Let's get out there tomorrow, and Tuesday, and Humpday, and Thursday, and Friday and share the Good News.

Let's not just GIVE LOVE AWAY as WE HAVE RECEIVED. But let's bear some fruit.

What's YOUR story? Well?

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

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<sup>1</sup> John Shea, *Eating with the Bridegroom*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005) p. 134.