

“Fear and Practice”

1st Pres San Bernardino

Psalm 111

2/1/09

Rev. Dr. Sandra R. Tice

“To fear you is the beginning of wisdom; all who do so prove themselves wise.”

I fear You because of Your vastness. Sometimes when I dive in to prayer I know that I swim in a lake that is bottomless, in an ocean with no shore. And I know how small I am, and how fragile.

I fear You because You will not let me control you. You are not tame, you do not promise to do whatever I want. You do not promise that life will not break my heart. You promise only that if it does, (when it does) You will be there, and I will be safe in your love.

I fear You because You are just, fiercely and unfailingly on the side of those who need you most. And I am not. I do harm each day by my choices: harm to the vulnerable whose faces I’ll never see, and worse: harm to those I love most dearly. I fear what it might mean to live justly.

I fear You because Creation is so very beautiful. Who makes a world full of roses and redtail hawks, sunsets and the sound of surf, yellow lemon against blue sky, and the uncountable winter stars? Every blade of grass, every note of music, every glimpse of a new baby makes me want to fall on my knees in wonder and awe.

You invite me to things that are beyond me, and *that’s* a little scary. You want me to grow. You ask me to live in community: to love people I would rather not love, to learn compassion, to be faithful, to forgive. You call me to live by your covenant. and to praise with a whole heart. You invite me to adventure: to fly on wings like an eagle, to join the journey to unknown places, to love the world at the risk of my own life.

I fear You because I cannot hide from You. You know me, and you love me- even the parts of me I hide. Your tenderness brings out the tears I have held inside, your kindness undoes my bravery. Your love invites my secrets out into the open. I am afraid because I cannot fool you by saying I am ‘fine’, but it is also a relief- to stop pretending, to stop running. To be held.

I fear You because, though I have sought you most of my life, I know I will never know You completely. You remain a mystery.

I fear You.

Not because you are evil, or cruel, or untrustworthy-
Because you are uncontrollable and mysterious,
because you are vast and beautiful,
because you want my healing more than my comfort
because you see and because you call and because you are just.

I know that You are the source of my life and my heart’s true home. You are the author of all freedom,

the inventor of joy,
the One whose name is Love.
You are the heart of this community.

NRSV says, *“the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, all who practice it will have understanding.”*

And so I practice my fear.

As a gymnast practices quieting the reflexes that make her flinch or hesitate,

And teaches her body to defy gravity

By facing her fear, and doing what is scary but joyful again and again...

So I practice taking steps of trust in your direction,

taking the risk of following You

Knowing that those who seek to save their life will lose it,

But those who lose their life for the sake of the gospel

Will find it.

“To fear you is the beginning of wisdom; all who do so prove themselves wise.”