

# “Love Expels Fear”

1 John 4:7-21, James 3:1-18, John 1:5, 2 Timothy 1:7

*Pastor James York*

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Today is Reformation Sunday, Friday is Halloween and Saturday is All Saints Day. All three are connected. "Hallow" in Old English means "holy" or "sacred", as in the Lord's Prayer, "Hallowed be Thy Name". "Hallow's Eve" or "Halloween" means the "evening of holy persons" and refers to the evening before All Saints Day, which is November 1.

In the early years of the church persecution was widespread, so the church set aside special days to honor the martyrs. In 609, the Pantheon Temple in Rome was stripped of all pagan gods and consecrated to “all saints” who had died from Roman persecutions. During the dedication, a procession of twenty-eight carriages brought the bones of martyrs from various cemeteries to the church. In the following years a festival of All Hallows evening, that is all holy persons evening, spread throughout the Roman Empire. As Christianity spread into Celtic lands All Hallows was merged with the pagan celebration of the Celtic New Year on November 1. The Celts believed at the New Year the dead came back to mingle among the living. As the ghosts came to the houses of the living, they were greeted with tables loaded with food. After feasting, masked and costumed villagers, representing the souls of the dead paraded to the outskirts of the town leading the ghosts away. The church tried to restrict this pagan celebration by replacing it by praising God for the saints; but in the end, the Christian All Holy Persons was blended with the pagan celebration becoming Halloween.

In the tenth century, the church added a second celebration on November 2nd "All Souls' Day" to honor not just the martyrs but all Christians who are enjoying resurrection. This holy day got twisted from celebrating their eternal life to fear of death. Some people prayed for the dead. Food was offered to the dead, some believed that souls in purgatory would take the form of witches, toads, or demons and haunt people who wronged them during their lifetimes. In the middle ages superstitions flourished; so, Halloween had little to do with thanking God for the saints and celebrating their eternal life in heaven.

The Reformation, in the sixteenth century was in part a call to put aside superstitions, to celebrate resurrection instead of dwelling on fear, death, and sacrifice. Martin Luther posted 95 theses on Halloween 1517. Luther nailed them to the church that held the largest collections of supposed relics. Pieces of bones from saints, locks of hairs from martyrs, a piece of the true cross, a twig from Moses' burning bush, bread from the Last Supper, a veil sprinkled with the blood of Christ – all were venerated and held in holy awe. The 17,443 relics were kept on shrines and decorated with gold, silver, and precious stones.

At that time there was no separation between church and state which led to some leaders in the church not wanting to love people and nurture their faith; rather, they raised money for the government which included themselves. These greedy leaders wrongly taught that paying special fees and paying to view the relics would shorten a soul's stay in purgatory by 1,902,202 years and 270 days! This was one of many issues Luther challenged on that Halloween. Luther rejected a waiting place, called purgatory, with the need for indulgences, which is payment, to hasten a person's entrance into heaven. Luther professed the free forgiveness of sin and resurrection to eternal life, not by relics, indulgences, or prayers rather by the grace of God.

In the United States for the first two hundred years Halloween was not observed. A large Irish immigration in the 1840's began celebrating Halloween with many of the old Celtic beliefs. As time went by, Satanism and the occult latched onto Halloween as a holiday to perpetuate fear.

The reformation cast out fear with God's perfect love. The reformers sought to educate everyone so they could read scripture learning about God's gracious love, the free gift of salvation by faith in Christ. Luther wrote a hymn in 1529: “Though this world with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us. The prince of darkness grim we tremble not for him his rage we can endure for lo his doom is sure one little word shall fell him.” That word is Jesus, the embodiment of God's perfect love, which triumphs over everything, even death.

Scripture proclaims. **1 John 4: 18NLT** “Love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced God’s perfect love.”

Today we are commissioned to cast out fear with God’s love. Whether you choose to dress up, watch horror movies, go to haunted houses, or hand out treats matters not as long as you celebrate God’s love that is stronger than any fear, horror, or darkness. Include in your festivities thanksgiving for holy saints, all who love you and thanksgiving for everyone you love who are enjoying the glory of heaven. Halloween is a celebration that Jesus **John 1:5 (NLT)** “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish the light.” Halloween and All Saints day celebrate resurrection, God overcoming every form of death with eternal life. Halloween celebrates that love will overcome hate and joy will overcome every sorrow. Halloween celebrates that your worst fear, my worst fear, and everyone’s worst fears combined cannot even in the least diminish the glorious love of God.

Scripture explains. **1 John 4:7-21 MSG** “My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses to love doesn’t know the first thing about God, because God is love—so you can’t know God if you don’t love. This is how God showed God’s love for us: God sent God’s only Son into the world so we might live through Jesus. This is the kind of love we are talking about—not that we once upon a time loved God, but that God loved us and sent Jesus as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they’ve done to our relationship with God. My dear, dear friends, if God loved us like this, we certainly ought to love each other. No one has seen God, ever. But if we love one another, God dwells deeply within us, and God’s love becomes complete in us—perfect love! This is how we know we’re living steadily and deeply in God, and God in us: God has given us life from God’s life, from God’s very own Spirit. Also, we’ve seen for ourselves and continue to state openly that the Father sent his Son as Savior of the world. Everyone who confesses that Jesus is God’s Son participates continuously in an intimate relationship with God. We know it so well, we’ve embraced it heart and soul, this love that comes from God. God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and mature in us, so that we’re free of worry on Judgment Day—our standing in the world is identical with Christ’s. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life—fear of death, fear of judgment—is one not yet fully formed in love. We, though, are going to love—love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. God loved us first. If anyone boasts, “I love God,” and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won’t love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can’t see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You’ve got to love both.”

Fear seems to be on the raise today. Much of our media is driven by ratings therefore money. Nothing seems to generate money better than fear. We are not to make a god out of money, to put our trust in money or let our life be guided by idols of fear, gossip and partial truths. Sometimes it seems that catastrophes and evil is exalted and told in great detail with enthusiasm. We are told to be afraid of many things, most of which will never happen. Some politicians proclaim fear, that we should be afraid of many things, afraid of their opponent, so they will fight for us and fight against others. Is God calling you to vote for those who are overcoming fear with love, for those who instead of fighting for you and fighting against others are making peace, for those who are building others up with love and caring for those in need with love?

If we are not careful, fear-filled stories and fear-proclaiming politicians will skew our compassion for others replacing our love for our neighbor with fear of our neighbor, replacing our joy in our glorious future with fear that things are getting worse. God promises that ultimately love will prevail. Scripture warns us about fear-filled speech. Our words have tremendous, destructive, power.

**James 3:1-18 (NLT)** “Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way. We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire.

**And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself. People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring. If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness."**

There is something much scarier than the dark side of Halloween, fearful speech that leads to disrespect of another person which leads to hate, fearful speech of one's disease, crisis, suffering or pain without a declaration that God's love will ultimately heal, fearful self talk that dampens one's joy. We are tempted to share stories of fear. It has been found that the average person is seven times more likely to speak of fear than love. What would our world be like if we, the media, politicians and everyone would tell a story of love for every story of fear? The temptation of fear is sometimes subtle and can seem like good intentions. Is there a point where a prayer concern tips from love to fear if a person tells more details of the issue than of healing and resurrection?

In a world of great variety why are many afraid of talking to people with whom they disagree? If we have an issue with someone, we are to go directly to that person and speak the truth in love instead of spreading fear by talking ill of anyone. God invites us to abide in love for love casts out fear.

Fear can set ablaze negative self talk. Fear that one will not get out of their slump. Fear that one will not be able to let go of burdens. Fear that one is not good enough, or doing enough or that one is not a magnificent masterpiece just the way they are. Fear that one will not laugh again after sadness, relax after stress, rejoice after sorrow. Ultimately God will expel every fear and negative experience will peace, love and joy.

Examine your thoughts are you thinking more loving or fearful thoughts. Examine what you are reading, watching, and listening to this week, are you spending more time abiding in love or fear? Compare the time you spend reading scripture and inspirational material with your other reading. If you watch a negative story about a group of people, then balance it with a story of how the same group of people is doing something positive. If you hear a negative story about a politician and complain, then balance it with something that the politician is doing right and share your appreciation for them. When you talk about family and friends, strive to focus on their positive aspects. Are you talking with a loving, positive person after every conversation with a fearful, negative person? James says the tongue is a restless evil, full of deadly poison; but if we abide in God's love, then we receive wisdom and the tongue yields becoming full of mercy, good fruits, gentle, peaceable and producing a harvest of righteous. 2 Timothy puts it this way. **2 Timothy 1:7 "God has not given us the spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind."**

Most of us are no longer afraid of witches, toads, and superstitions; but, some of us are afraid of things that will never happen told by fearful people. Some of us are afraid, because we are unable to perceive how God's love will overcome our suffering, disease, pain, broken relationships, guilt, low self-esteem, and every fear with glorious resurrection. Is God calling you to be the Martin Luther of our day boldly proclaiming that love expels all fear?

We should not be afraid, not because bad things will not happen to us or be done by us; rather, we are not to be afraid because God will transform all and everyone into glorious love for eternity. All our mistakes, shortcomings, and failures are forgiven by God. There is absolutely nothing, not even our worst nightmares, that can ever separate us from God's love.

A survey determined the number one fear in the United States is death; yet, Jesus conquered death and is alive forever, likewise Jesus will resurrect us.

All of us are on a journey to perfect love, but none of us are there yet so all of us wrestle with fear. Scripture reveals both the God nature and human nature of Jesus. Jesus revealed his human nature in Gethsemane. Fully-human Jesus was afraid of his crucifixion. One of fully-human Jesus' fears was that he would be separated from those he loved for awhile until everyone is reunited with Jesus in heaven. Jesus would miss meals with his disciples, so he celebrated the Lord's Supper and told them, and us, to celebrate the Lord's Supper imagining how all of us will be united in harmony, feasting with God, for eternity.

On the cross Jesus experienced every pain, sin, and fear of every person who was, is, and will be. Jesus conquered them all for us. Jesus came back to earth, in most appearances Jesus first words are, "Do not be afraid." You can flip through the Bible, over and over again when a person encounters God the first words are, "Do not be afraid." Jesus has been in our shoes and knows fear. God right now knows your every fear. God knows how destructive fear can be – leading to hate between people, how fear can cause us to hate ourselves, or get stuck in depression or focused on the hurt unable to see the unity, healing, and eternal life. God desires for us to abide in God's love for love will cast out your fears.

Karl Wallenda spent much of his life on a high wire, thrilling crowds with his performance. In 1978, Wallenda plunged 75 feet to his death. When his widow sorted out what happened, she noticed how her husband had recently become fearful, focusing on how not to fall instead of focusing on performing his act. His fear shifted his perspective to thinking about what might go wrong rather than the thrill of doing things right.

Life is risk. Playing it safe by living in fear and speaking fear is misery. Loving boldly is abundant life. Know that even if all the worst case scenarios happen to you and you die the worst death, all of that will be overcome by glorious eternal life. Until God resurrects you, you have a choice to live in fear or to live in love. Amen