

Why are you afraid?

Our new PB-elect had a couple of things to say about fear in this morning's sermon. It seems to me that these words speak to this coming Sunday's Gospel as well. So here is the beginning of her sermon. You can read it all on the diocesan website: www.diocese-eastcarolina.org.

Just click on Bishop Katharine's picture at the bottom of the page.

Here's the start of the sermon:

This last Sunday morning I woke very early, while it was still dark. I wanted to go for a run, but I had to wait until there was enough light to see. When the dawn finally began, I ventured out. It was warm, and still, and very quiet, and the clouds were just beginning to show tinges of pink. I ran by the back of the Hyatt just as two workers were coming out one of the service doors. They were startled, I'm afraid, but I nodded at them, and they responded. I went west over the freeway, and encountered a man I'd seen here in the Convention Center. Neither of us stopped, but we did say a quiet good morning. Then I found a lovely green park, and started around it. There was a man with a reflective vest, standing in the street by some orange cones, as though he were waiting for a run or a parade to begin. I said good morning, and he responded in kind. Around the corner I came to a bleary-eyed fellow with several bags who looked like he'd just risen from sleeping rough. I said good morning to him too, but I must admit I went past him in the street instead of on the sidewalk. Then I met a rabbit hopping across the sidewalk, and though we didn't use words, one of us eyed the other with more than a bit of wariness. Around another corner, a woman was delivering Sunday papers from her car. She was wary too, and didn't get out of her car with the next paper until I was a long way past her. Back over the freeway, and a block later, two guys seemingly on their early way to work. We nodded at each other.

As I returned to my hotel, I reflected on all those meetings. There was some degree of wariness in most of them. There were small glimpses of a reconciled world in our willingness to greet each other. But the unrealized possibility of a real relationship -- whether in response of wariness, or caution, or fear -- meant that we still had a very long way to go.

Can we dream of a world where all creatures, human and not, can meet each other in a stance that is not tinged with fear?

When Jesus says that his kingdom is not of this world, he is saying that his rule is not based on the ability to generate fear in his subjects. A willingness to go to the cross implies a vulnerability so radical, so fundamental, that fear has no impact or import. The love he invites us to imitate removes any possibility of reactive or violent response. King Jesus' followers don't fight back when the world threatens. Jesus calls us friends, not agents of fear.