

Have you ever seen someone so afraid that their face went completely pale white? They were afraid of something that was about to happen? Something that could happen? Stunned and speechless. That was the look on my father's face as I pulled out of the driveway the first time I ever drove a car. I was in the driver's seat for the first time in my life. (No – this didn't happen a couple of weeks ago either... I'm not sixteen... I'm twenty-eight.) My father sat in the passenger's seat, biting his nails as I made the first left turn of my life.

I asked him why we decided to take mom's car and not his. “Oh, no reason in particular,” he said. “Mom's car just has more gas in the tank. That's all.” Yeah, and probably a little bit more insurance, too. Who knows. That wasn't going through my mind though at the time as I made the first right turn of my life. What was going through my mind was the location of the brake pedal and the gas pedal. Brake, left... gas, right... brake left... gas, right. And after about five minutes of driving, I felt confident in my abilities to drive. That was also about the same time when I got the pedals mixed up and almost completely ran a stop sign. I almost accelerated through the stop sign rather than coming to a stop. Brake, *left*... gas, right. That same look of fear that my dad had seemed to come across everyone else stopped at the four-way stop that I almost ran through.

Finally we pulled back into the driveway. It was only about ten minutes of driving altogether. For my father, it probably felt like about ten years. We had survived though. My father would face his fears again the next night as we tried driving again. He never received an award for his efforts in teaching me to drive. No gold medals. But maybe he should have.

We don't usually receive awards when we face our fears in life. We don't exactly receive a gold medal for it. But, it happens everyday, people facing their fears. There is no shortage of fear in our world. When a small child starts going to a new school, not knowing a soul in that place – a fear is being faced. When a parent sends their child off to college, all kinds of fears are being faced. When we say goodbye to a loved one before we place him or her into the ground at their funeral, all sorts of fears are being faced. Left and right. We have fears. We might not go broadcasting our fears to people left and right. Sometimes, we're afraid of people knowing our fears. Fear built into fear. Interesting. There is no shortage of fear in this world, in our lives. There is plenty to go around. Not too many gold medals for those who face these fears either, some facing their fears each and every day.

Our reading from 1Peter this morning tells us, “Do not fear what they fear. Do not be intimidated.” It seems as though fear is nothing new. It's been with us forever. It's hard to tell exactly what context this was being written, 1Peter. I'm pretty sure it wasn't originally written with student drivers in mind. It probably didn't have much to do with first century fathers teaching their first century sons to hop behind the wheel. It's hard to tell exactly what the source of fear is in this letter, though. It sounds as though some people were trying to lead these readers down the wrong road, a road that led to greater fear. “Do not fear what *they* fear.” Who are they? Not sure. It's all a little bit of a mystery.

The one thing that we do know is that fear was a problem for this first century audience, those who originally read this letter. People were afraid. People were afraid of other people. Whoever *they* were, *they* were causing enough fear in this audience of 1Peter's that it needed to be addressed. It needed to be looked at. Something was going wrong. Maybe the fear was beginning to cause rifts. Maybe it was beginning to cause division. Maybe people were beginning to cave into fear rather than caving into hope, caving into peace. Whoever *they* were, apparently *they* were beginning to sweep this audience in 1Peter into fear, stirring up people's fears, riling up people's fears. It was becoming a problem for this early church.

That's what fear does. Fear is a problem, more often than not. There is such a thing as healthy fear. When I was behind the wheel that first time, that probably wasn't too terrible of a time to be at least a little bit afraid. More often not though, fear limits us. It divides. It trips us up. It steals our energy away from us like a thief. Ten minutes can seem like ten years. And if we let it, it can steal the strength in our souls right from us, too. Fear drains us. Fear holds us back from what we could do. It hinders us from what we are able to do.

The voice of fear, more often than not, seeks to distort the truth. This is important to know. Fear, more often than not, distorts the truth. We could be looking at a gold mine one minute, and the voice of fear inside would have us believe that we're looking at nothing but dirty, crummy rocks. It's not a gold mine. It's a landfill of refuse and waste. Nothing but dirty and crummy rocks.

Think of all the self-doubts that plague people's lives, that kind of fear. Think of all the little comparisons that are being made...

"I'm not nearly as good as so and so."

"They're golden, I'm not."

"I never measure up in so and so's eyes."

"I could try to do that, but so and so would be much better at it than me."

Fear distorts the truth. And if left unchecked, that fear itself begins to rot and waste away, and we're left with what that fear dissolves into – guilt and shame and anger and any number of other things that can weigh us down in life.

It's in the face of all this that our reading tells us, "Do not fear what they fear. Do not be intimidated. Set Christ apart as Lord of your hearts." In other words, don't let any fear rule your heart. Fear wastes our energy. It steals our hearts away from who they belong to. Our hearts have been bought with a price. Let Christ and his freedom rule our hearts. Be free of fear. Be free of unhealthy guilt and shame and anger.

Christ is in it when fears are faced. We may not win a gold medal when we come to the truth about fear – how it holds us back from so much in life. We may not win a gold medal when we face our fears. But there is already a goldmine within you, a goldmine of gifts, of talent, of love, and strength, waiting to be shared, waiting to be excavated. And Christ weeps when we leave behind that gold mine in our lives and we let it sit there undiscovered, never excavating it, never exploring that goldmine. Who needs a gold medal when we have a goldmine? Christ is Lord of our hearts. And there's a ton of freedom in that gold mine. Thanks be to God. Amen.