

## Love Casts Out Fear

Rev. Rebecca Clancy  
I John 4:18-21

My recent trip with my young daughters to the family farm offered proof of the maxim, “You never know what the day will bring.”

I was packing up the girls to take them on an excursion when my mother rushed out and said, “You’d better not go, a tornado warning has just been issued for the county.” “A tornado warning?” I questioned skeptically. “You must have heard wrong.” After all, the sky was blue, and the sun was shining. “Well then, come and listen to the radio yourself,” she insisted. It turned out she heard *right*. The National Weather Service was reporting a “storm cell with rotation,” as it phrased it. This, I quickly learned, referenced a volatile weather system capable of spawning funnel clouds at any time. One had already been sighted. It was about ten miles southwest and heading due east, however, so we appeared to be out of danger.

Just then the National Weather Service began reporting a second storm cell with rotation, this one about ten miles *northwest* and heading due east. “They’ll pass right above and below us at about the same time,” my mom said. “For some reason that feels eerie.” I concurred that it felt eerie, almost like there was some intelligent force behind the storms that was steering their paths. The feeling intensified when a third storm cell with rotation was reported, this one in between the other two. It was headed directly for us. All of a sudden it felt like that intelligent force was diabolical -- like it was toying with us as the prelude to our destruction.

We stepped out on the porch and could see the storm on the horizon, approaching with seeming malevolent intent. The National Weather Service began to declare a state of emergency for the entire county, warning all listeners in no uncertain terms to seek shelter in basements or center rooms under tables. Those on the roads were directed to lie in ditches. We heard the scream of distant sirens.

I gathered the girls into what I deemed to be the safest room in the house. I covered a table with a blanket and filled the under space with pillows. "Let's build a fort!" I said with false cheer. My tone was obviously unconvincing, because May started to cry. "I'm scared Mommy," she said. Soon her sisters were crying with her."

"Could this be the way I die?" I began to wonder. "It couldn't be," I reassured myself. "My time couldn't be up yet." But then I realized that that's probably what they all say -- as their plane is going down, as they are moved into hospice care, as they are abducted..... I suppose that because our lives are so important to us, we mistakenly think that they are important to the proceedings of existence. We mistakenly think that they will be spared, that we will be exceptions. But there are no exceptions. Not even for three little girls who have already been snatched like brands from the fire. I thought of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount, "He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous."

And send the rain He did. The rain poured and pounded. The wind howled and roared. All the while the National Weather Service droned on and on a litany of warnings. "I can't stand to listen to this anymore," I said. I turned the dial and heard a voice that was strong and calm. It turned out to be a local pastor. In the wake of the emergency, he had taken to the airwaves. He was commending his listeners to prayer. "I ask everyone who can hear my voice, whatever you

are doing, to stop, and to pray for your neighbors who are in harm's way," he said. "Pray first that their lives are spared. Pray next that they escape bodily injury. After that, pray that there is no damage to their property." "And please," he adjured, "don't forget to pray for the farmers. After last year's floods, they're already shouldering about all they can. Friends, pray for them all." And so I did. I prayed for them all. I looked over at my girls, who were calm now, their hands clasped in prayer. And suddenly, I felt the peace that passes understanding.

You never know what the day will bring. I guess what the day brought even more so than tornados, was the certainty that love casts out fear, just as the Bible proclaims.

Now there may be some among you who are of a more *practical* bent who might take issue with the certainty that it is love that casts out fear. You might say that a storm cellar, had I the sense to have had one dug given that the farm is in tornado country, would better have cast out fear because it would have *offered protection* from tornados. But let's argue it out for a moment. Let us return to the maxim, "You never know what the day will bring."

What if the day after your storm cellar offered protection from the tornados, you learned that you had cancer? In your practical way you would probably answer that you had cast out fear again through protection from cancer: through your purchase of premium health insurance policies and your maintenance of healthy habits as well as your submission to yearly early detection tests, not just for you but for all your loved ones as well. Any cancer that found would have been found early and amount to no more than a minor medical nuisance.

Fair enough, but what if the day after your bout with cancer some sin to which you are subject surfaced and threatened to undermine your standing or your relationships? In your practical way you would probably answer that once again that you have cast out all fear of this kind of threat

through protection from sin: that just as you maintain healthy habits you too practice clean living. You are without sin, both of the venial and mortal variety. O.K, despite the evangelist John's assertion that, "anyone who says he is without sin is a liar," I'll grant you that.

What then if the day after that you lost your job and the stock market again collapsed? Doubtless in your practical way you would have again cast out fear through protection from financial ruin. You would have stored gold bricks in a lead safe sufficient to live out your days, and on and on and on we could go.

Still, I'd continue to argue with you because not only would we come to see that are you spending your entire life – all your time, energy, and resources – in your practical way casting out fear through protections, but you'll also come to see that you'll never quite cover it. There will come a time when you will find your practicality exhausted. There will come a fear you cannot cast out through protections, and this is not even to mention the most fearful, thing for which human kind is yet to devise any protection, and that is death.

So let us reconsider the certainty proclaimed by the Bible that it is *love* that casts out fear. What is behind the Bible's proclamation that love casts out fear is that assurance that when Christians love, by a miracle of God's grace, they access the love of Jesus Christ. And think about what the love of Jesus Christ cast out -- it cast out the chaotic and violent powers of nature, it cast out sickness and infirmity, it cast out the sin in its every manifestation, it cast out the demonic forces of evil, it cast out even death. The love of Jesus Christ cast out each and every basis for fear.

But the best argument is a practical one. Love casts out fear. Try it. Practice Christian love. Let it be confirmed in your experience. Amen.