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**Easter 3 – May 1, 2022**  
**“The Debate”**

**Sing Amazing Grace (236 Red) Vs. 1,3, & 4**

**Pastor will start the sermon talking about Paul.**

**Andy will interrupt and say: Hey Pastor I think we have an issue, we need to go back. We completely skipped a verse from “Amazing Grace.” I think we should go back and do it.**

**Pastor: you mean verse 2?**

**Andy: Yeah, the one about grace teaching our hearts to fear.**

**Pastor: Well, here’s the deal Andy. We borrowed that hymn from the Anglican’s. When we took it into the new official hymnal, they deleted that verse because Lutherans have a problem saying “Twas grace that taught my heart to fear” because grace is always associated with love, not fear. You know how proper I am, so I deleted it.**

**Andy: But how can you separate a discussion of love from a discussion of fear. I mean Martin Luther himself starts every section of the Catechism with “We should fear and love God.” It makes it sound like the two are inseparable.**

**(Andy Starts Walking)**

**Pastor: Well, hold on, he only does that for the Commandments; you know they’re different. Some people think the Commandments don’t apply to New Testament people. Although, that presents a different problem we can’t get into. Well, maybe we could talk about this another time. I have a sermon planned. I’m sure everybody here is expecting that sermon, so why don’t you pack up all that stuff you’ve got with you. By the way, where did you get all that stuff from?**

**Andy: Doesn’t the Bible also say that we need to be ready at all times and in all places to provide evidence for the hope that is within us? You mean you don’t just carry stacks of theological papers with you everywhere you go? I thought everybody did that.**

**Pastor: No, I leave them on my desk. That’s why you can’t see it. It appears you’re staying so let’s get a little more organized. Let me talk about God’s love. We’re in the Easter Season and we obviously see God’s love in Jesus Christ. He gave Himself so that we would not have to suffer and die. That’s what God’s love is about, it’s all that wonderful stuff that people want in their life and frequently are missing. How can they have it if they’re scared? Especially, if they’re scared of God?**

**Andy: I think maybe that’s part of our problem here. I think you’re confusing the biblical command to fear God with being scared. When the Bible commands us to “fear”, it isn’t commanding us to be**

**“scared”. We’re not talking about being scared of the dark or being scared of spiders. We’re talking about biblical fear and that’s a completely different thing.**

**Pastor: Because I don’t want us to misunderstand each other, because we want to be friends here, right? Why don’t you tell me, and everyone else here, a little bit more about what that idea of biblical fear is.**

**When the Bible talks about Fearing God, it is always as part of a contrast between the righteous and the unrighteous; the wise and the unwise. Job 28:28 says, “The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.”**

**I've got a little story that might help illustrate this - you like to use stories in your sermons right? OK, so I grew up on a dairy farm. To get milk, you need cows. You need your cows to have baby cows. And that means you need a daddy cow – a bull. In the years I lived on the farm, we had a bunch of different bulls, and I think I had bad experiences with almost all of them. But there was one - a little red jersey, and I never had a real problem with him. Do you know why? It was because I feared him, and it made me pay attention!**

**He didn't like me, and I didn't like him. So I made sure I always knew where he was. I knew how far away he was, I knew in what direction the nearest escape route was, and I knew how to avoid provoking him. The purpose of fear isn't to make you "scared"; the purpose of fear is to make you TAKE NOTICE. To make you pay attention, to keep you focused. That's why the fear of the Lord can make you wise. Because if you think about God in everything you do, you will be a lot less likely to do really stupid things!**

**Pastor: Well that’s really great Andy. I appreciate that but don’t you think that if you know that God is so loving you would always pay attention to Him? Haven’t you found that in your life?**

**Andy: Actually Pastor, in my experience it's exactly the opposite. When things are going great I tend to forget all about God. It's so easy to get caught up in the good things; your hobbies, the nice weather (well, maybe not in New York.) But unless we make a conscious effort to turn our attention towards God, it is easy to forget Him and lean on our own understanding.**

**Pastor: I really appreciate what you’ve said here but I do wonder if you’ve gone a little bit overboard. In the New Testament whenever angels appear, what’s are the first words out of their mouths?**

**Andy: “Fear not.”**

**Pastor: Exactly! “Fear not” I’m glad you know that. So therefore maybe fear isn’t really as important as it used to be.**

**Andy: But pastor, my point is that fear is about noticing and paying attention to God. We just talked about Paul's conversion in the lesson today. A blinding light and a voice from heaven calling his name. Do you think maybe, just maybe, Paul NOTICED that? After his conversion, I think you can safely say that Paul NEVER ignored God again! Do you think maybe he was a little afraid?**

**Pastor:** Wow, if that had happened to me. I think I might have needed to change my tunic. O.k., I'll give you that God is certainly concerned about fear because He does use it with Paul and others, but He uses so that they'll know all about His love. So therefore, I would present to you that love is more important than fear.

I have a question too. I have a problem with the word should because that is an expression of the Law rather than the Gospel. Should, would, ought are all things that say this is an obligation of us. So I want to dispute this from another direction. In Matthew 4: 10 the very first thing that Jesus says is that "we should serve God only."

God doesn't want to be first in our lives. He wants to be only. Jesus says in Mark 12: 30 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength." So if we are to love God with everything, then when we talk about putting Him first, we're saying we could move Him to second. That's why He wants to be only.

**Andy:** I agree; "putting God first" is the wrong way to say it. God should be everything, not just the first thing. But that's almost exactly what I'm trying to say is the purpose of fear. The ACT of fearing God, not the FEELING of being scared is what's important. Whenever you do anything with the understanding that it is God's will, that IS putting God first. Feeding the hungry isn't putting God second; feeding yourself isn't even putting God second. Because when I eat I thank God for the food! We have tremendous freedom in Christ. We are called to serve, but we aren't given many specifics. "Love your neighbor" is a pretty broad command. But if we choose to fear God, we will be watching for Him in every situation, and always finding new opportunities to serve Him.

And as for love being more important than fear, I think that misses the point. Saying one is more important than the other is like saying that one blade on a pair of scissors is more important than the other. They are both equally important; they work together.

**Pastor:** Well, Andy I'm glad to see that we have really come to an understanding about this and I think it really helped the congregation this morning.

(Andy starts to gather his stuff and leave the podium.)

**Pastor:** I'm glad you are so excited to come here. I'm glad we agree on what fear really means. but I am concerned that fear could become unproductive, being afraid of God isn't really productive at all, is it? After all, if we were actually "afraid" of God, we wouldn't be able to love Him; and that would be unproductive.

(Andy sighs and returns to the podium, looking disgusted...)

**Andy:** Pastor are you implying that you can't love something and be afraid of it at the same time? Granted, we just talked about what the true purpose of fear really is. But it's also perfectly normal to be afraid of God in the more traditional sense. That doesn't mean you can't love Him.

**Pastor:** Well, I am wondering about that Andy. Do you have something that could illustrate what you're talking about at all?

**Andy:** Sure, I think so. For starters, have you ever been to the doctor? Or worse, a surgeon, who had to cut you open? I've had surgery before, and I didn't like it. I was afraid when that needle went into my

arm. But I know the doctors only wanted the best for me. I was afraid they would hurt me, but I trusted them to take care of me. There are times in our lives when God gives us things we don't want, often for reasons we don't understand. It's OK to be scared. When Christ was in Gethsemane, He was obviously afraid. He didn't want to go to the cross. But did anyone ever love God more than Jesus? His trust overcame His terror, and it meant more BECAUSE it overcame that terror.

There is no shame in being afraid of God and what he will do. In fact, I think being afraid of God can actually help us love Him more.

Pastor: How so?

Andy: Hey Amanda, can you pull up slide #1?  
(A slide appears of a terrifying roller coaster.)

Pastor: Wow, you even have slides for the screen? I guess it doesn't hurt to have your wife running tech. I don't have those types of "in's."

Andy: Does anyone here like roller coasters? I LOVE roller coasters! And I love them BECAUSE they're scary!

(A slide appears of a kiddie coaster.)

Now this ride, not so much. Sure, it looks like a nice enough ride. Comfortable, approachable, very soothing. But not exactly the kind of thing you write a sermon about.

(The first scary roller coaster slide comes back.)

But this - I mean doesn't this look awesome?!?!? Now I want you to look at this picture; not just the ride itself but the faces of the riders. They're all on the same ride, but they all react differently.

Real life is like this ride. It makes us afraid, makes us nauseous, and sometimes it gives us whiplash. It isn't always fun. We get sick, we get old, we hunger, we suffer, and at the end of the ride we die. It's scary.

But God is the engineer who designed this ride. We're on the track that He prepared for us. We can be scared, we don't always have to like it. But when we reach the end and get off the ride, the engineer will be waiting to meet us. When he asks you about the ride, what sort of answer do you want to be able to give Him?

(Slide of terrified woman)

"Oh, it was awful! I was so scared the whole time, I was sick and it hurt and I hated every minute of it!"

(slide of impossibly calm woman)

or: "Meh, I wasn't really paying that much attention. It just kinda came and went."

(slide of people having a great time!)

or do you wanna be this guy: "OH WOW what a ride! I was young and then there was this big hill and all of a sudden I was grown up and married and then there was a loop-de-loop and I had FOUR BOYS!!! and all of a sudden there was one more big hill, and then I was over the hill, and then I was here. WOW! What a crazy life! Maybe I should've gone on the kiddie coaster. Can I go again???"

**And I think that's the answer that will make the engineer smile. Because that's how God wants us to live! With our fear and our love and our joy all mixed together. And he's gonna come up, and smack you on the back and say "Hey son, that WAS the kiddie coaster! We have an eternity of adventures ahead of us; and you ain't seen nothin' yet!**