

Sunday 21st June 2026. Benefice Holy Communion,
Ampleforth.

“So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows”.

Do you know what the most repeated command in all of Scripture is? It is this: do not be afraid. Again and again, from Genesis to Revelation, God’s people are told: ‘Fear not.’ The command we are given most often is not to first, to worship God, or to love God, or even to love our neighbour. It is this: do not be afraid. So, it is no surprise to hear Jesus say it in today’s Gospel. Have no fear of those who might wish you harm. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Even the hairs of your head are all counted by your Father in heaven. And then Jesus gives us that beautiful word of comfort: ‘So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.’ So, let me ask you this: what are you afraid of today? What fear do you carry with you?

Fear is a powerful thing. It is an important emotion, and sometimes it is a necessary one. Fear can keep us from harm. It can sharpen our senses, focus our minds, and move us to act when danger is near. Fear, in the face of real danger, can save our lives, or the lives of those we love. We have all heard stories of people doing extraordinary things to protect their families, or even strangers, and often those acts of courage are fuelled by a healthy and powerful fear. So, fear itself is not always bad.

But there is another kind of fear. A fear that lingers. A fear that whispers. A fear that will not let us rest. We might call it anxiety, or worry, or dread. This kind of fear is often a lie. It does not save life; it stops us from truly

living. It grows out of our attempts to control our lives, and the lives of others. It grows when we forget that we are children of God, held in the hands of a loving Father.

When that fear takes root, we begin to live in ways God never intended. It can make us suspicious of people who are not like us. It can close our hearts to those in need. It can keep us from answering God's call. This fear is a liar, and we must call it out, as St Paul describes in his letter.

This lie gnaws away at us and says: you are not good enough; you are not strong enough; you are not worthy; you are not loved; you will never be enough; you will always be alone; grace will never change you. And when fear has finished speaking to us, it turns us against one another. We gossip and criticise. We bully and hate. We condemn which is the fear that made the people of Jerusalem change their cry from 'Hosanna' to 'Crucify!'

But John tells us that 'perfect love drives out fear'. That is the good news. One day, God will take all fear away. One day, the reign of heaven will be fully restored. Nothing that is covered up now will remain hidden. Everything will be made known. Evil and injustice will not have the final word. Secrets, lies, and all that damages our trust in God and our love for one another will be brought into the light. And in God's light, all things will be made well. That is God's promise. That is why we need not be afraid. All we have to do is trust.

Should we fear God? Yes, because Jesus tells us to. But this is not the fear that destroys us. This is the fear that sets us free. To fear God is to take God seriously. It is to give our whole lives to Him and to His will. It is to stand in awe before the One who created the universe, who

created each one of us, and who loves all that He has made. And here is the wonderful irony: when we truly fear God, when we stand in awe of His holiness and trust in His love, every other fear begins to lose its power. If God is God, and if God loves us, then what else is there to fear?

To fear God is to trust His love. And if we can trust His love, then there is nothing else to be afraid of: not today, not tomorrow, not ever. Can we do that, today, now? Can we receive the gift of God in His Son? Can we repent, turn to Him, and receive forgiveness and healing? Can we believe that God became one of us in Jesus Christ to reach out to us, look upon us, and save us? Can we believe that no fear, nothing at all, will be able to separate us from the love of God? Thanks be to God. Amen.