

Who is my real enemy?

The battle and the enemy

Last service, Michael talked about 2 things besides basketball that stress us out about an uncertain future. (1) The fear that we won't have the capacity to handle it. (2) There is enough at stake for us to care about the outcome. We learn from Paul's letter to the Philippians that, with God's help, we have the capacity to handle whatever life brings. And that we are to view the magnitude of what is at stake from the distance of eternity. For then every problem suddenly seems smaller.

For me, basketball is, in a certain sense, a picture of our life here on earth. It's a game. And to get the best out of it, you need to master its technique, you need to be in good shape, you need to know how to work with the ball, but in the end you still find that it's not enough. That it's not enough to be able to make a great three-pointer and hit the basket, but that it's about being able to do it, even when the opponent (the enemy) is preventing you from doing so. Today we want to focus on what strategy to take against that enemy that can neutralize our capabilities and shuffle our bets.

How react to the enemy? Matthew 10,24-31

In the middle of the struggle, uncertainty, and potential danger, Jesus, through this one phrase, provides us with a few landmarks and footholds to help us identify the enemy and prevent him from robbing us of the human and divine capacities we have at our disposal and confusing our bets.

1. Tension one: Don't be afraid VERSUS rather be afraid (recognize WHEN to be afraid).

It is very popular to say that if you believe in God, you have nothing to fear. If we take this to mean that a Christian should not be afraid, then we are actually denying how God created us. Fear is one of the most basic emotions that protects our lives. There is an organ in our brains called the amygdala - it allows us to identify danger and react to it before we can rationally evaluate all the arguments of whether the danger is really significant. The downside is that our amygdala misjudges a situation now and then, and because it tends to shut down our rational thinking, this sometimes leads to unnecessary flight or attack reactions (depending on the nature of the situation). Jesus, by saying "fear not VERSUS rather be afraid," cultivates our emotional and rational thinking in a direction that maintains our capacity to respond to real dangers while maintaining a healthy semblance of peace even in the midst of conflict and danger. It leads us to the wisdom of fearing only what is truly worth fearing. There is no need to fear every uncertainty. God has everything in His hands.

2. Tension two: People to fear VERSUS Spiritual forces to fear (recognize WHO to fear)

We may feel that there are many enemies around us. We are experiencing misunderstandings on many fronts, we are losing the last refuge of unity, and even the Church cannot resist polarization and trench warfare from advocates of various opposing positions and views. But Jesus does not say, "Fear the people around you." Jesus says, "There is only one enemy." Ephesians 6:12 ***For our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against authorities and powers, against the world-rulers of this dark night, against the spirits of evil in the heavens.*** We are not waging war against men, we are waging war against spiritual forces. If we are to reliably identify the enemy ("whom to fear"), then you can be sure that if you are naming him by the name of any man, then you have made a mistake. Don't be afraid of people. Don't be fooled, the real enemy is not man, but the workings of the Evil One in and among us.

3. Tension three: killing VERSUS killing (recognize ABOUT WHAT to fear)

The first "Killing" is a process that is already happening. It is impossible to follow Christ and not experience that something in us is dying, that there are losses we must write off. Whether it's time, energy, money, desires. It can easily happen that we begin to perceive this dying for Christ in a negative way, that we become "tired". But this "killing" - stepping out of our comfort zones, making sacrifices, making a commitment - can be the healing that allows my heart to regenerate and my mind to stay healthy. The ability to recognize what is worth worrying about. In contrast, it is the second "killing" that will happen in the future and will be definitive. It's easy not to think of Him because He is far away, and unlike the first one, seemingly not happening now, but that is the mistake. The enemy is the lie that nothing is at stake now. Matthew 10,29-31 We don't have to worry unnecessarily about the things God says are in His hands ("the

hair on our head"). There is no point in pouring our potential into it when we know that God has given us a much bigger mission here on earth. We are called to take the gospel and "worry" about our own salvation and the salvation of others, not the things in which God has promised to take care of us.

4. Tension four: I can't VERSUS It can (recognize the BOUNDARIES)

The majority of "enemies" (besides THE one real enemy) CANNOT destroy (a soul). Their power is limited, and thus a dam can be built. They can be defended against. There is a limit to where they cannot go. It is important to keep this in mind as we face human injustice on this earth. Evil has only limited power, whereas the true God is the Lord.

Fearing the LORD first, taking to heart His promises, His warnings and His warnings - this is the counterbalance to fearing people who also rightly "strike fear", whether by their authority, their power and strength, or their superiority over us. Someone wise once said, "He who kneels before God can stand up to anyone." Yes, he who fears God, who seeks His will in humility (kneeling), need not then fear men and their threats. He can straighten up and face anything and anyone squarely. *PROVERBS 29:25 The fear of man is a cause of danger: but whoever puts his faith in the Lord will have a safe place on high.* If you let the fear of people go beyond the healthy boundary of your heart, if you fear people more than you fear God, then you are allowing the real Enemy to make an accomplice in your heart (soul).

5. Tension five: body VERSUS soul (focus on the right GOAL)

The last tension is crucial. We can be overcome with fear for our "body," fight many battles for the things we love, but lose the war for our own soul. We're frightened of obstacles, we're afraid of loss, we're really not happy about it. We think about how to get rid of the "enemy", how to keep the things we love, but we forget what is happening to our heart and our soul.

Apostle James (1,2-4 a 12-15) writes in Bible - We are to rejoice in trials because they mature our hearts to perfection. At the same time, he warns us that our heart can become a source of temptation and our downfall. Most of the time it is quite difficult to get rid of every external "enemy" or to avoid every loss. Circumstances are usually not in our hands, but what we do have in our hands is our own heart. We will only be truly defeated if we focus on the wrong target - external circumstances, instead of waging a battle for our own heart.

Which is why...

Ephesians 6 ¹³ For this reason take up all the arms of God, so that you may be able to be strong in the evil day, and, having done all, to keep your place. ¹⁴ Take your place, then, having your body clothed with the true word, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness; ¹⁵ Be ready with the good news of peace as shoes on your feet; ¹⁶ And most of all, using faith as a cover to keep off all the flaming arrows of the Evil One. ¹⁷ And take salvation for your head-dress and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: ¹⁸ With prayers and deep desires, making requests at all times in the Spirit, and keeping watch, with strong purpose, in prayer for all the saints,

Therefore, cultivate spiritual and character strength. Take up and practice using the armor of God: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, God's Word, and prayer, so that you can stand.

The Lord's Supper - Jesus is the victor!

John 16,33 I have said all these things to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have trouble: but take heart! I have overcome the world.

Do you confess that you are a sinful person, that you grieve the Lord God by your disobedience and hurt your neighbors, God's creation, and yourself? If so, answer. I confess.

Do you believe that Jesus Christ was delivered up on the cross for your transgressions and raised on the third day for your justification? Do you believe that because of his sacrifice, God forgave your sins and promised you eternal life? If so, answer I do. I believe.

Do you accept your brothers and sisters as God has accepted you in Christ? Do you forgive them for what they have done against you? Do you seek their forgiveness where you have trespassed against them? If so, say I forgive. I forgive.

I now assure you of the forgiveness of all your sins because of the infinite love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The Son of God has paid the price for us; we are redeemed.