

A Season of Fear

It's best to stay in touch with both sides of an issue. A person who fears God deals responsibly with all of reality, not just a piece of it.
- Ecclesiastes 7

While on travel recently, I experienced the most intense fog that I recall in recent days. It seems that the coast (or areas close to water) produces the highest levels of fog whereby visibility is practically zero. Standing at a hotel window at mid-morning, I guess that visibility was no more than 50 feet – as I could not even find my rental car in the parking lot. In addition to my unfamiliarity with this town was the thought of trying to navigate with such low visibility. It's bad enough driving an unfamiliar car in an unfamiliar town – especially at night; but to make such attempt in the fog has an added challenge for even the resident driver.

Hours later, I am airborne, sitting at the aircraft window in the late afternoon. On descent into Orlando, visibility quickly narrows from an elevation above the clouds to within the clouds; and similar fog envelopes the plane beyond the tip of the wing. Somewhat in a personal or mental fog, I am more intrigued by the temporary change of visibility, the vertigo and a child-like wonder of walking on the clouds. Much more rapidly than the fog of the mid-morning, the clouds at mid-altitude vanish leaving the clearer vision ...with the aid of corrective lens.

Recollections of dense fog include a few mornings on the commute, a boat ride up the Mississippi River, and a walk along Lake Michigan. The walk on “the lake” was memorable because, in anticipation of seeing one of the Great Lakes for the first time, I could scarcely see beyond the shore. This memory and the Mississippi boat ride offer a greater appreciation for maritime navigation to include the obligatory fog horn and other such tools and techniques that date back in history.

Fog seems to offer benefits in the annals of maritime (and aerial) combat as this natural occurrence allows for stealth and other such defenses in the light of day. In the basic understanding or impression, fog has very little mass compared with the apparent density to reduce and obstruct vision. A first or naïve impression could be causal inconvenience, but a seasoned impression would be the serious caution followed by decisive delay; as in its sometimes unexpected and unassuming approach, fog can quickly envelope all space and bring all movement and its decision to a veritable stagger and complete suspense.

In the realm of our thoughts or dreams, fog may represent a hindrance or sense of misplacement or loss. The image of groping in a fog – in search of something or someone – can be interpreted as a fear of loss or being lost. In reality, fear can emerge and envelop our bodies and souls with its paralytic poison; and like fog, can distort and disguise the most normal and acceptable of form leaving our judgment and confidence in question and doubt. Like the fog (outside my window) and the clouds, fear can vary in its presence and intensity with all the unpredictable and foreboding of its arrival; and at times it may pass with the least of conscience and concern, while at other times, it may hang with such density as to drown hope, and such duration as to dissipate faith.

A photograph of interest and intrigue, the image of a fog-laden playground (or swing set) invokes a degree of concern – as though the expected children have somehow wandered off into the unforeseeable. A playground is common with seldom consideration much less concern; but envelope it in a fog and suddenly the impression changes and emotions stir. For a parent of such account, the photograph (or more relevant, the image) could be something from a dream, a nightmare of sort: as they imagine themselves adrift in the fog,



frantically searching for someone or something – any sign or evidence of the lost or misplaced child. The swing set being the last place they saw their child and now, in the depth of this fog, unable to find – to see or hear – any evidence that the child is near. It is an eerie image, an eerie thought.

Fog is not alone in creating such an eerie sight or thought. Smoke produces a similar effect though with an odor. With the presence of smell, smoke is more than fog – it has a substance and power that can truly stifle and suffocate. Smoke is both a natural and unnatural occurrence that is often associated or linked to health and environmental problems, but can also pose panic or immediate fear in places like hotels and airplanes.

In the figurative sense, “Blowing smoke” is an idiom for words or speech that lack integrity or even meaning. In the contemporary language of *The Message*, “smoke” is commonly used with the phrase “spitting into the wind” – both of which suggest meaninglessness or futility. In this sense, smoke is just smoke – without fire or any real substance or meaning. Someone could be “blowing smoke”, but than again, “where there’s smoke, there’s fire”, right?

What fog may conger-up in our dreams or images, smoke can produce in realty. Peering out the window at a fog or cloud is one thing, but smelling or seeing smoke is altogether different; the one causing us to gaze with wonder, the other sending us into panic. Fog may have its characteristic foreboding, but smoke carries the likely sign of something wrong and potentially harmful and deadly. Words or speech may only be “blowing smoke”, but can be much more I’m afraid – fire or no fire!

A Season of Fear is more than the impulses to incidents or occurrences of fear – such as when a child darts-out into traffic or some other near-miss or close-shave. Oh, I remember such incidents or occurrences as causing alarm but only as an impulse or instant – and not a period or season. If these incidents had been catastrophic – such as the loss of that child – than the period or season of fear would have been the course; but fortunately, such has not happened...as far as I know.

As fear seems to be more about the uncertain, a season or period prevails with an ebb and flow of conscience or consideration. The season may well have it incidents and occurrences too, but is otherwise a sort of malaise. As with an illness or disease, fear shows itself in random and illusive symptoms that may or may not be identified with the cause or condition. Fear may grow in malignant forms to anger, rage, bitterness, and beyond; and in these stages, can be distorted or even denied in both presence and predicament. Fear can also be contracted – even intentionally – by the near presence and projection. As with fog, fear touches or infects everyone and everything; and while seemingly innocuous in its apparent temporal and tacit forms, laces the soul with a power that transcends temperance and engenders emotion beyond reason and truth.

History offers many lessons on the use of fear to influence, control, demoralize and even destroy people and populations. In its sometimes unannounced and unassuming approach, fear can quickly envelope the soul (and souls) and bring all movement and its decision to a veritable stagger and complete suspense. The thought (of the people) could be

that this is just an incident or occurrence, and with an impulse, the fear will be over and done; but the intention (of those aimed to influence, control...people) has always been for a season or period – enough time to subvert reason and truth, and crush hope and faith.

History offers many lessons on the analogous rebels or dissidents – who are not so infected, but by some degree recognize the malignant forms, the symptoms and even the cause and conditions. Reason and truth are the antidotes that, with steadfast and judicious application, can address the cause and potentially limit the spread of fear. There is always a cost (or sacrifice) however, and as with any cause, the outcome or spoils belong to the victor. Hope rest in the potential that such cost – however measured and appropriated – will limit and thereby save (or set free) some of the infected or diseased with the malignant forms. Faith comes in the assurance that fear can be eradicated in time by the understanding that people are not God and that God is not a people. Until such time – and while the cost accrues – the disease looms as a fog carried by “blowing smoke”.

Waking from my dream – whether an actual or figurative description – the swing-set is in full view with all its color and saddled children. My hands and arms are busy pushing one, two or even three children in a concerted effort; and my mind is beyond the eerie image and thought of...

Years later, I am airborne; and on descent into Orlando, think with excitement of these children who live less than two hours away by car. On this day, I will not see my children but can imagine a walk along a lake, a trip up a river, and many commutes without the conscience or concern of...

At present, I am standing at a window at mid-morning, and guess that visibility is very clear – my mind on Hope with its costs, Faith with its assurance, Reason and Truth with the power to render Justice and Righteousness...and fear is seasons away.