

**New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario**  
**Sunday, December 30, 2018**  
**Rev. Dr. David Thompson**

**Choose life and love in 2019**

I have a question for us all for 2019. Are we going to be motivated by fear or by love in 2019?

We all know that fear is a very powerful motivator. Ever since 9/11 some people have been afraid to fly suspecting that there might be a bomb on the plane. Take Aunt Bessie for instance who had relatives all over the US. Aunt Bessie loved to visit her nieces and nephews, but the problem was that no matter how much she enjoyed seeing them, she hated flying. No matter how safe people told her it was, she was always worried that someone would have a bomb on the plane.

She read books about how safe it was and listened to the stewardess demonstrate all the safety features. But she still worried herself silly every time a visit was coming up.

Finally, the family decided that maybe if she saw the statistics she'd be convinced. So, they sent her to a friend of the family who was an actuary.

"Tell me," Aunt Bessie said suspiciously, "what are the chances that someone will have a bomb on a plane?"

The actuary looked through his tables and said, "A very small chance. Maybe one in five hundred thousand."

She nodded, then thought for a moment. "So, what are the odds of two people having a bomb on the same plane?"

Again, he went through his tables.

"Extremely remote," he said. "About one in a billion."

Aunt Bessie paused and then said "Right! Where can I buy a bomb?"

Text: "I have set before you this day life and goodness, death and evil: therefore, choose life, that both you and your children may live!"

We all know that fear is used extensively to motivate people in election campaigns. That is what the negative ads are all about. Fear is used as a motivator by her majesty's loyal opposition every day. I expect a ton of negative fear to be poured out for the Fall election campaign. Wait for it!

Fear seems to work on the personal level too. Take the true story of Bill and his wife Carol. Carol used fear to manipulate Bill in order to get her way.

Two years ago, both Bill and Carol held good jobs. Carol was a teacher and Bill had had a good job in advertising but had lost it due to a change in the business climate and through no fault of his own. One day he was offered a job out of province. Excitedly he told Carol all about it.

Carol said; "Go ahead take it if you want but understand that it is the end of our marriage if you do. I'm not moving out of Ontario."

A short time later Bill was offered a job in the US.

He told Carol. Again, she said "Take it if you want. I'm not moving." Bill turned the job down.

Bill had tried so hard to get anything locally and now it had been two long years of unemployment.

Then another job offer came this time from Calgary...

It was 8:15 in the morning, Carol had left for school and Bill sat by the phone. The same icy fear that had gripped his heart was there in full force as it had been every time, he had turned down a job to keep his marriage. Carol had used this threat every time they had had a problem. Bill knew that he could not continue to live like that.

He picked up the phone, dialed the number and accepted the job. With a strange ache in his stomach he put down the phone.

Is it right to use fear to motivate people? Some educators believe that fear should not be used in parenting a child. Instead a child should be reasoned with. Rewards should be given for positive behavior and the behavior that we don't like should be ignored.

Some people who act as mediators believe that people are essentially rational. They hold the belief that effective communication, defined as active listening and assertive speech, resolves most conflicts. The theory is that when people who are in conflict are presented with an assessment of the costs of their behavior, they will choose the less costly course.

But Allen Tidwell, an Australian mediator disagrees. He argues that people are not necessarily rational beings at all. To believe that people make rational decisions based on logic is largely fallacious. People he argues are rarely consistent, often holding thoughts, ideas and desires that are mutually inconsistent. While two people objectively see the same event, both will perceive it in terms of their own beliefs and values.

For Tidwell, the mediator's task is to bring people together by persuasion- using the same techniques of the advertising executive, the politician and the sales person. The repertoire of skills include manipulation, persuasion, audience analysis and fear based on self interest.

He assumes that all persuasive messages are based upon assumptions of motivation. Is it right then to use fear to motivate people?

I think that when we use fear to manipulate and control people we are already in the field of the unethical. There may be cases where fear used to manipulate people may be the only way to stop them from fighting, but I seriously wonder whether it is the best way? I note this as a Christian. **Christ does not use manipulative fear.** He uses something much older, a law of the universe to motivate people.

The old law is the law of reciprocity: **Whatever a man sows that shall he also reap.** This is the law of consequences also known as karma- to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Sow love and love will come back to you. Sow resentment and resentment will come back to haunt you.

Let's notice what Jesus does consistently. He places the positive consequences beside the negative consequences of behavior. Listen!

*Every good tree brings forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.*” In other words, Consequences!

In a hard saying he states that only people who have done God's will, will enter God's presence. Saying you will and not actually doing it doesn't cut it! *“Not everyone who says Lord, Lord to me shall enter, even if they say they have done wonderful works in my name. I will say depart from me I never knew you. Depart from me you who do evil.”*

Again, describing the wise person, he says that they are like the man who builds his house upon a rock and when the storm and floods come it stands. But side by side with that teaching he places the story of the man who built his house on sand. The storm comes and because the life lacks foundation, the construction topples. Consequences!

Time and time again Christ juxtaposes the negative and the positive consequences. Is Jesus interested in persuading people? You bet he is! Does he, like the Hell fire preacher attempt to manipulate them by fear, to try to scare them into faith? No, He puts, as fairly as possible, both sides of the issue and then let's the person choose freely.

Now let's return to the text with which we began. For it contains a bias. It does not read like this; *I have set before you this day life and goodness, death and evil; therefore choose.* It reads with a bias. **Listen; I have set before you this day life and goodness, death and evil: therefore, choose life!**

Throughout Christ's teaching there is this bias. :-) He wants us to choose life!! He uses every argument, every parable, every example- he does everything he can to get us to choose life. He also makes a determined bid to get us to use **love** rather than fear as a motivator.

Have you ever read the famous classic American short story The Devil and Daniel Webster?

Jabez Stone is a hard luck farmer who after failure after failure decides to sell his soul to the Devil in order to change his luck. His failures turn to successes but after the time period is up the Devil returns for his due which is the soul of Jabez Stone. Jabez demands a trial as an American citizen and the devil agrees and picks the blackest felons in American history as the judge and jury. Jabez picks Daniel Webster to defend him.

The jury files in: America's worst 12 dead men!! Walter Butler who spread fire throughout the Mohawk Valley, Simon Girty who saw men burnt at the stake, Governor Dale who broke men on the wheel, Teach the pirate, John Sweet the strangler...soon the tale of twelve was told. Judge Hawthorn who had presided over the Salem witch trials was the justice.

The trial began. Every time the devil raised an objection it would be objection sustained. Every time Daniel raised an objection it would be objection denied. It got to Daniel in the end. He began to heat up like a forge. He was going to flay the Devil with every trick known to the law. He didn't care if he got contempt of court or whatever was to happen to him.

When it was his turn to speak to the jury, he was all ready to burst out with lightning and denunciations, but just before he did so he glanced at the jury as was his custom. And he noticed that the glitter in their eyes was twice as strong as when they came in and now they were all leaning forward. Like hounds before they get the fox they looked and the blue mist of evil in the room thickened as he watched them. It was his own anger and horror that burned in their eyes.

Then he saw what he had been about to do and wiped his forehead as a man might who had just escaped falling into a pit in the dark. **For it was him they had come for not only Jabez Stone.**

He paused. How was he to motivate them?

He began with simple things that everyone of us has known and felt- the freshness of a spring morning when you are young, the taste of food when you are hungry. These things were good for any man he said but without freedom they sickened. When he talked about the sorrows of slavery his voice became like a great big bell. He admitted all the wrong that had ever been done. But he showed how out of the wrong and the right, the suffering and the starvation, something new had come. And everybody had played a part in it- even the traitors.

Then he showed how Jabez Stone had been an ordinary man with hard luck who had wanted to change it. And now because he had wanted to change it, he would be punished for all eternity. He showed that there was good in Jabez Stone. Sure, he was hard and mean in some ways, but he was a man. There was sadness in being man, but it was a proud thing too.

Daniel was telling the story of the failures and the endless journey of mankind. They got trapped, tricked and bamboozled, but it was a great journey. The devil could not know the inwardness of it- it took a man to do that.

Daniel's voice searched the heart of every jury member. To one his voice was like the forest in its secrecy; to another like the sea and the storms of the ocean; one heard the cry of his lost nation in it; another saw a harmless scene that he had not seen for years. Slowly the glitter went from the eyes of the judge and jury and for a moment they were free men again. The jury went out and returned the verdict: "We find for the defendant Jabez Stone."

Daniel Webster almost made the mistake of forgetting the greatest law of all about human nature: *Whatsoever you sow that shall you also reap*. Sow hate and the jury's eyes glitter with all that hate! But talk softly, lovingly of their pasts, refuse to judge or condemn them, speak of freedom, show that out of both the right and the wrong something new comes and the glitter goes out from the jury's eyes!

What is the point of this story? If you want to persuade people, **you have to go for the heart**. You have to love them not manipulate them.

Jesus was so human. He got frustrated and fed up with his disciples. He had to withdraw from them to meditate and recover. He wept at the tragic death of Lazarus. He sweated blood in the Garden of Gethsemane and then threw himself on the wheel of history, the wheel of suffering and death and died for the cause for which he stood.

Jesus' battle, although greater, was that of Daniel Webster's- it was for your soul and mine to give us meaning and hope for our despair and life instead of Death.

Once after preaching about forgiveness I was shaking hands at the door when a man came up to me and said. "How can I be forgiven? The man I wronged is dead."

I paused and said; "Ask forgiveness anyway. God straddles two worlds, this and the next and that man you think is dead is alive in God. Ask forgiveness regardless through prayer.

The man paused and drew himself up to his full height and with tears in his eyes he suddenly said "And I have a great lawyer! Jesus Christ." (What immediately flashed through my head was an image of Daniel Webster before those glittering eyes!)

And I thought this guy is right, Jesus is the greatest advocate of all. He sets out the case of life so clearly in terms of the great law of consequences. He says: "I have set before you this day life and goodness, death and evil". But then he does everything in his power including giving his own life's blood to persuade us as human beings to choose *life*.

I speak to you in the name of Jesus Christ today: Will you, in everything you do in 2019 choose goodness- will you choose life?