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Thoughts
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New Fears

As my wife and I were driving to church last Sunday, she received a chat text from our daughter who lives in Northern Ireland. Our son-in-law is a technical climber, an instructor of mountaineering instructors actually, and their two daughters are quite the outdoor enthusiasts normally. In fact, at just about 4 years old the older girl had her own YouTube video from climbing with a head cam up a considerable route, probably 100 meters, as her father belayed for her from above. She was quite talkative and admired the scenery and adapted to the challenges of the slope. Apparently, more recently when they went out for a climb, she was not cooperative. As my daughter put it, she just whimpered.

I reflected on this for a bit, and then it struck me. I said, "Children often live into new fears. Perhaps being too naïve when younger, or having had something else make them suddenly aware of some similar danger, they go from complete ease with something, to being fearful of something we once thought they had mastered." And later they will also grow themselves out of that once-new fear.

Then I realized this phenomenon has been quite a common experience for most adults as well. We often live into new fears. We have been going along just fine in some area of our life, and suddenly something causes us to discover a new fear. It can be change around us, or a headline which upsets us. It might be sensing someone might not come through for us, or even that God seems somehow unresponsive this time around. We live ourselves into a new fear. We were at ease, but are now afraid.

And actually I think this is just the way it should be. We need to truly incarnate ourselves into our own lives, to enter fully even the challenging aspects of our experience. And if we do this deeply, we will at times be struck that we are "out of our depth." Somehow a familiar situation will draw from us unfamiliar anxiety. And of course our response could be whimpering and withdrawal. But that reaction entails withdrawal from our lives. And such an attempt to "save our life" is more likely to cause us to "lose it."

Indeed, could we not say that the promises of Jesus and the Father to "never leave or forsake us" are focused mostly on the new fears into which we live? We may think, "I won't have enough," "I won't be at home," or "I will be abandoned on my own."

It seems to me that the promise of Jesus is not to keep us from discovering new fears, but to incarnate his life into ours and to help grow us out of those new fears, perhaps only by remaining in them with us. I see this so often in people I most admire. They turn from withdrawal and incarnate themselves deeply into the complexities of their own life. In so doing, they at times live into new fears. But they press on and eventually grow themselves out of those once-new fears.

Such people realize that Jesus could not join them where they are not. Withdrawal from their own life would be withdrawal from the incarnational presence of Jesus in their life. So when their life causes them to "live into a new fear" they anticipate meeting Jesus there! And they incarnate themselves deeply into their own life, and find the Savior incarnate right there with them.

I am pondering this still, but I am strongly drawn to this image, though I admit it may seem ethereal to some. So let me close simply by saying, "Live into new fears!" And may Christ incarnate meet you there!

