

Facing our fears and following Jesus

By [Kendra Weddle](#)

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I am embarrassed by where I live. Irving, Texas, used to be known as the home of the Dallas Cowboys, the professional football team. In fact, Valley Ranch, the specific area of Irving where the Cowboys practice, is just a few blocks away from my home. It isn't this part of Irving that embarrasses me, however.

During the last few weeks, Irving has become known for its anti-Muslim sentiment, clearly displayed by a group of protesters who have camped outside of a local mosque with their guns and signs prominently sending their message: fear and hatred.

Before the Muslim protests, there was also the young boy who took his homemade clock to school. Instead of being lauded for his creativity and initiative, he was scolded and isolated, his Muslim identity called out as teachers and administrators chose fear over any other reasonable response.

Being afraid is, well, pretty terrible. Our heartbeats increase, our hands become clammy. Our physical bodies, in other words, register a built-in reaction to something or someone alarming. And yet, as we learn when we're young, often our fears are unfounded. That unexplained noise rousing us in the middle of the night, upon investigation often turns out to be not someone breaking in, but the dishwasher or ice machine.

As it turns out, however, learning about our fears is more difficult than creating barriers. Embracing fear rather than seeking to understand where it comes from leads to easy solutions. We simply create boundaries that allay our fears by keeping them hidden. The walls we erect are not just physical such as borders and fences, they also are ideological. How and when and where we draw these boundaries convey much about who we are and what we fear.

It is easy to reflect upon the current political milieu as an illustration of our propensity to react to fear with increasing amount of boundary talk, whether in the form of deportation, inhospitality to refugees, or religious-based immigrant policies.

Those with simplistic answers and certitude have been given the most airtime; their approaches rewarded by numerous people who are giving into the temptation to let fear have the final say rather than examining where it comes from and why it has emerged with such power.

As we are fully in the embrace of Advent, awaiting the birth of a little baby, I am struck by the paradox that exists in this event we celebrate. The incarnation—God in the world—is nothing short of learning to welcome the unknown. What does it mean to follow Jesus? Doesn't he take us into the slums, to eat with those we don't know? Into the back alleys to share what we have with those in need? Into the temple to challenge those who have created religious systems that benefit the rich? These are dangerous places; places where fear is surely felt.

Jesus' actions lead us to the very places we are scared to enter. But he didn't create boundaries; instead he extended compassion—at great cost. The question seems to me: what are we willing to lose in order to follow Jesus?

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