

BBC RADIO ULSTER

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Friday 13th December 2013

So, it's Friday 13th.

Are you afraid?

If the fact that today is Friday 13th fills you with a sense of fear and foreboding then you probably have a case of a Friggatriskaidekaphobia.

Some people will change their routines today, some may choose not to fly today and others may not even get out of bed, such is the power of the superstition of Friday 13th.

According to the Stress Management Center and Phobia Institute in the North Carolina Friggatriskaidekaphobia afflicts 20 million people in the United States. Symptoms range from mild anxiety to full-blown panic attacks that may cause people to reshuffle their schedules or miss an entire day's work.

However in 2008 Dutch statisticians found that Friday 13th is actually safer than an average Friday. The Dutch Centre for Insurance Statistics found that fewer accidents and reports of fire and theft occur when the 13th of the month falls on a Friday than on other Fridays. Does this mean people are more careful or stay at home on Friday 13th?

Human beings can have phobias about anything. You're probably familiar with claustrophobia and agoraphobia, but have ever heard of Arachibutyrophobia - that's the fear of peanut butter sticking to the roof of your mouth. And I kid you not, the fear of sticking your neck out is known as - Giraffeophobia

I think 'll stop there as I don't want to bring on any cases of phobophobia this early in the morning.

But it's sad when our lives are ruled by fear. We don't have to have phobias to have our lives constrained by anxiety.

Fear of failure can hold us back.

Fear of rejection or fear of commitment can limit our relationships.

Fear of what others will think and say can stop us from being ourselves and flourishing.

The Psalmist writes:

'The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?'

And of course in Psalm 23:

'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.'

The New Testament says 'There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.'

So at the risk of sticking my neck out, before I develop Giraffeaphobia, I'd like to wish you a very good Friday 13th, let's let go of some of our fears today and forget the Friggatriskaidekaphobia!