

## Overcoming Fear

Isaiah 43:1-5a:

**43:1**

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

**43:2**

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

**43:3**

For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

**43:4**

Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life.

**43:5**

Do not fear, for I am with you;

John 14:25-27:

**25** "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. **26** But the Advocate, [F124](#) the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. **27** Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Fear is something we all experience. Sometimes it is God's gift to us to warn us of danger. At other times, fear stands over against our faith.

Fear occurs at different levels and times in our lives. Fear can be very personal. In life's journey, fear can occur around issues of health; while battling an illness or facing a surgery, fear can arise. Or, there are times when a deep seated insecurity about identity, worth, vocation or function causes fear to grip our hearts. Many have experienced fear in their relationships. Sadly, for some, that fear is of physical danger. For others, a fractured relationship leaves behind only second guessing, anger and fear. Today, many ask fearfully if they will find a new job or have enough resources to keep solvent. Fear touches nearly every human life individually.

Fear also can be collective. Think back to some fearful times in our nation's history. Pearl Harbor, deaths of leaders, sputnik, 9/11; together we could continue to list collective times of fear. And our current times are marked by fear as well.

Some of the nation's largest banking, insurance and automotive concerns have failed or received bailouts. Bankruptcies and mortgage defaults are running high. Our service men and women are in harm's way in Afghanistan and Iraq, though to a lesser extent. There are those who have perverted their own

religion into killing any who disagree with them, including women and children. And even though the stock market has shown some strength of late, many still find their retirement nest eggs much smaller than they used to be. Unemployment, experts say, will continue to climb and be slower to recover. Rancorous debates in our legislatures leave everyone frightened about the future. All sides seem to peddle fright by saying “everything’s awful, let us fix it” and other voices say, “their fix will be our ruin”. World hunger runs unabated; two thirds of the world lives in abject poverty. Seemingly mad rulers seek atomic weapons and gain the UN as a forum for promulgating warped views of history. The mid-east situation is farther from peace. What would shock our parents is broadcast on TV. Some state governments are trying to define a holy rite of the church, marriage and several denominations no longer follow the scripture for ordination requirements. All of which and more, lead to collective fear.

How do we move and live through such fear, whether individual or corporate?

**I. First, we must listen to God.** And the converse is true: Don’t listen to passing human chatter. The human chatter of our day is marked by overwhelming pessimism. I think this is because our country has become so brittle and partisan and has forgotten that one of our national strengths has historically been the ability to “agree to disagree in an agreeable fashion”. Nowadays, our political debate seems to be based on name calling, anger and tearing down. Politicians curry favor with a 24 hour news cycle by a continuous stream of putting down the other side. What happens is, we the citizens get enveloped in a fog of doom and hopelessness that they continually portray. Fear is the result.

It would be good for Christians to remember the Old Testament story of Joshua and Caleb, for the individual and collective fears we have. The Children of Israel had been miraculously delivered from bondage in Egypt under Moses. It was time for them to enter the land of Canaan. The Lord told Moses to send twelve men, a ruler from each tribe, to spy out the land. Do you remember the names of any of these twelve men? Very likely you remember the names of two of them: Caleb and Joshua. Do you remember even one of the other ten? Most students of the Bible would not remember even a single one. Why? They came back with an evil report, and so discouraged the people that they rebelled against Moses, and against God.

Caleb and Joshua were different. They had faced the same challenges as the other ten men, yet these two had that indomitable courage and zeal, and faith in God, that the others lacked, and the Lord honored them for it. They alone were allowed to enter the Promised Land, something denied to all of the adults who refused to obey the Lord.

You may remember the account. When the twelve spies came back from their forty days of inspection of the land of Canaan, they brought with them pomegranates, figs, and a huge bunch of grapes. It was so large that it took two of the men to carry the large cluster between them on a pole. All the spies were

agreed on one thing: it was a "land flowing with milk and honey." Joshua and Caleb, though, were the only ones with sufficient faith in the Lord to undertake the conquest of the land.

The other men concentrated on the difficulties they would face. They said: " The people there were strong, the walled cities were very great, and there were giants there! We were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and also in their sight." How did they know that? It was their fear they were expressing.

Caleb spoke for himself and Joshua. "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it." (Numbers 13:30)

The people wept all night, we read, and when Joshua and Caleb tried to encourage them to obey the Lord and go in and possess the land, as the Lord had commanded, "the people were ready to stone them to death!" (Numbers 14:10) The ten spies and all who took their part could have enjoyed the blessings of Canaan if they had been willing to trust the Lord. As it was, they all passed up that opportunity and died in the wilderness. How tragic! Listen to God, not negative politicians pandering for popularity! Listen to God when you are facing a personal trial; hear again our verses:

***"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior".***

The first step in overcoming fear, is to listen to the Lord's trustworthy truths instead of negative human chatter that will be forgotten tomorrow.

**II. Next, let us remember, the same loving God who has been with us in the past is the same loving God who is in our tomorrows.**

Sometimes, we may not want to know our future. Have you hear the funny story about the fortuneteller and the frog? Here it is: picture the Fortuneteller, gazing into crystal ball, to frog: You are going to meet a beautiful young woman. From the moment she sets eyes on you she will have an insatiable desire to know all about you. She will be compelled to get close to you--you'll fascinate her." Frog: "Where am I? At a singles club?" Fortuneteller: "Biology class."

It may not be good for us to know the events of the future for such knowledge might keep us from enjoying today. However, we should always remember Who is in the future ready to meet us, lovingly. Think of this, is you are to be met at a particular place and time, the one you are to meet has to arrive before you. Now listen to Psalm 59:10 a: **"My God in his steadfast love will meet me."** And hear who holds all time in Rev. 22:13 **"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."**

We may not know the specific events in our tomorrows but we know who holds tomorrow is already there to meet us.

An interesting map is on display in the British Museum in London. It's an old mariner's chart, drawn in 1525, outlining the North American coastline and adjacent waters. The cartographer made some intriguing notations on areas of the map that represented regions not yet explored. He wrote: "Here be giants," "Here be fiery scorpions," and "Here be dragons." Eventually, the map came into the possession of Sir John Franklin, a British explorer in the early 1800s. Scratching out the fearful inscriptions, he wrote these words across the map: "Here is God."

Corrie Ten Boom says, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God."

To overcome fear we must listen to God and know that the Lord is in our tomorrows with love and kindness for us.

**III. Finally, to overcome fear we must live what we believe.** Sometimes convenience, comfort and fear will keep us from living what we believe; for acting on our beliefs.

Dr. J.B. Gambrel tells an amusing story from General Stonewall Jackson's famous valley campaign. Jackson's army found itself on one side of a river when it needed to be on the other side. After telling his engineers to plan and build a bridge so the army could cross, he called his wagon master in to tell him that it was urgent the wagon train cross the river as soon as possible. The wagon master started gathering all the logs, rocks and fence rails he could find and built a bridge. Long before day light General Jackson was told by his wagon master all the wagons and artillery had crossed the river. General Jackson asked where are the engineers and what are they doing? The wagon master's only reply was that they were in their tent drawing up plans for a bridge. (*Pulpit Helps*, May, 1991)

And if the truth be told sometimes we stay in our tents; safe, comfortable, dry and warm. Sometimes we're more comfortable studying the Bible than applying it to our lives. Sometimes we find it convenient to talk about the life of Jesus, rather than let Jesus live in and through us.

In contrast, Paul teaches us in Philippians 1:27-30 27: **"Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, 28 and are in no way intimidated by your opponents."**

Did you catch two important phrases: "live your life" And, that we can do so "in no way intimidated by your opponents."

So isn't it time? Time to live our lives in no way intimidated by our opponents? Our opponents personally of disease, fractured relationships, unemployment, shrinking nest egg? Isn't it time to claim that fact that even if we can't do it on our own, His promise is to be with us always and because of His presence in the counselor, we can have hearts that are not troubled but at peace, even if all around us are fearful?

Here's a very practical way you may wish to exercise your faith this morning: consider making a "faith estimate of giving". We've journeyed together the last several weeks exploring our relationship to our money and our Lord. We've learned some pragmatic lessons and explored that true joy is found in Christ who gives us the ability to live in generosity and simplicity.

Now, if you're a guest or are even a member who for some reason can't make a "faith estimate" of giving this morning, please know that we wouldn't expect such of guests and that God understands everyone's situation if you are a member and can't give an estimate. But if you're a member and today want to come to God's altar together with the rest of your household and pray and leave an estimate of giving card on the altar rail as a sign of living what you believe, that you're encouraged to do so.

All of these faith estimates are just that, an estimate. They can be changed at any time in the year by speaking with our treasurer, Margaret Langston in the office. She is the only one who knows the amount of your estimate, besides you and the Lord. None of the pastors or anyone else sees these. But they do help this congregation estimate what resources it has for ministry next year. Just as you like to know what you might have as income to run your house, so as responsible stewards, your Finance Committee would like an estimate on money available for running the Lord's house next year; I'm sure you understand and appreciate that approach.

Please know that the future of this church is in your hands. For nearly two hundred years before us we've had a legacy of generosity and now it's our turn. The budget of the church has not been set. It will be set based on what the people resource through these estimates. So we will do as much ministry as we can, if you estimate generously. You will receive in the mail shortly, a copy of your estimate, so don't worry about that. If you would like more time to pray over this, we will have our second consecration Sunday next week. So now we invite you to bring forward your faith estimate of giving cards, after I pray for this holy time.

Prayer: O Lord, help us to overcome the fear that seems to surround us. Some of us are afraid personally because of a challenge we are facing. Help us to know we face no challenge alone. Others of us are afraid collectively. Help us to know that no matter what humans may say You are the Ruler of All! Your goodness is in our tomorrows and Your Word is truth. Help us all to act on our believe by making a faith estimate this day, trusting that You will provide both to us and your congregation here. We ask this in Christ name. Amen.

