

LIVING LIFE WITHOUT FEAR



Scripture:

Psalm 85:8-13

⁸Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. ⁹Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

¹⁰Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. ¹¹Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. ¹²The LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. ¹³Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

Matthew 14:22-33

²²Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

²⁸Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³²When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



'Living a life without fear.' Do you think that is possible? It is possible when you live your life with faith. Can you imagine having so much faith you would step out into stormy waters and try to walk on the waves to Jesus?

What would your life look like if you feared nothing? If you never were afraid of anything. What if you never feared failure? Would you have had a different career? If you had no fear would you have tried some daredevilish adventures? Would you be

living in a different place, had more or less kids or married someone different? Imagine living your life fearlessly. Maybe you would be an astronaut or a rodeo rider? (Those are two of my fantasy jobs.)

What would your life without the fear factor in your choices look like today?

Some level of fear is good to have to keep us safe. But fear can go too far and prevent us from truly living.

CHARLIE BROWN

In honor of the Charles M. Schulz Museum's fifteenth anniversary, I found a Charlie Brown cartoon that relates to our passage.

Lucy Van Pelt asks Charlie Brown, Are you afraid of responsibility? If you are, then you have hypenphyobia.

Charlie Brown: I don't think that's quite it.

Lucy: How about cats? If you're afraid of cats, you have ailurophobia.

Charlie Brown: Well, sort of, but I'm not sure.

Lucy: Are you afraid of staircases? If you are, then you have climacaphobia. Maybe you have thalassophobia. This is fear of the ocean, or gephyrobia, which is the fear of crossing bridges. Or maybe you have pantophobia.

Do you think you have pantophobia?

Charlie Brown: What's pantophobia?

Lucy Van Pelt: The fear of everything.

Charlie Brown: THAT'S IT!

AUTHENTIC PHOBIAS

This is funny, but I don't want to disrespect people who have authentic phobias that cause them psychological paralysis. I have a friend I have known since age three who was diagnosed with agoraphobia in college.

Agoraphobia is the extreme irrational fear of crowded spaces or enclosed public places. My friend would sometimes break down in tears and have a panic attack when she felt trapped out in public, even if there was no apparent danger. Over time, she refused to go anywhere. When I tried to understand where she got this fear it was not that hard to figure out.

In high school, she was popular, involved in sports and drama. But at home she lived with a very critical father who was our bank vice-president. He expected perfection from his children. At home she was bombarded with messages that made her feel she wasn't thin enough, or pretty enough or smart enough. These messages preoccupied her brain to a point where she thought people everywhere were always looking at her and judging her for not being "perfect."

We have fears in our lives for many reasons. The healing power of faith can make a difference. When you know God loves you and thinks you are perfect just as you are, you can venture out into the world unafraid of what others think of you.

OUR HOPES AND OUR FEARS

A pastor friend of mine answered a question I put on Facebook. I asked, "What would your life look like without fear?" He said, "Our lives are either driven by our hopes or driven by our fears."

If you fear so much that you tend to isolate yourself and don't venture too far from home then your horizons are limited and that limits your ability to grow and understand and help others. If you are fearful of others, then you miss out on meeting new people and learning how they live and survive.

Irish priest and poet, John O'Donohue said, *"There is an unseen life that dreams us. It knows our true direction and destiny. We can trust ourselves (and God) more than we realize and we need have no fear of change."*

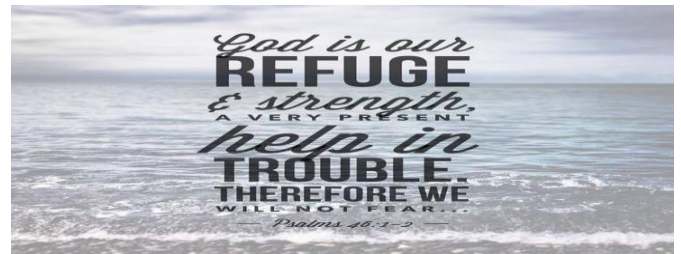
In another poem Father O'Donohue says, *May I "do at last what I came here for and waste my heart on fear no more."*

When you step out on the water of faith and trust that God will save you from the storm of uncertainty all fear melts away.

How much fear do you carry around with you in your daily life?

The Bible mentions 'Do Not Fear' or 'Do Not Be Afraid' or 'Have No Fear' or 'Have no anxiety' about one-hundred-forty-five times. Notice that they are spoken as commands, not as, 'you might consider not being afraid.' God commands us to have no fear. To be faithful to God, we must live our lives without fear.

I printed out for you all the verses that a blogger named Millie found and listed showing how this theme runs throughout the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation. This is one of my favorite passages on fear:



The two main themes in the Bible are 'Do Not Be Afraid' and 'God is Love.' So if people ask you why you believe in the Bible and God, you can tell

them that this is a very healthy way to live your life, knowing you have nothing to fear, and that God loves you more than you can hope for or imagine. Living your life without fear and knowing you are embraced by heavenly love is God's intention for you. And those two states of being fearless and beloved are very liberating and peace-giving, too.

Faith helps you sleep at night. Rather than counting sheep when you can't sleep, count the passages that say DO NOT BE AFRAID.



JESUS GAVE US ABUNDANT LIFE

Jesus came to give us life and give it abundantly. The way Jesus gave life was to forgive, heal, and to show in his actions how much God loves us by sacrificing himself for us. Jesus gave his all for us fearlessly, and we are to do the same for God, fearlessly.

Throughout his ministry Jesus taught his disciples to not fear but to trust in God and in him. In our reading today Jesus calls his disciples into the tumultuous sea. He doesn't direct them out of the storm but he calls them to go out into it.

The scripture says that Jesus *made* the disciples get into the boat. The Greek verb used in that sentence can also mean "to force" or "to compel." Jesus compelled them to get into the boat and set out into a rough sea.

It was like a boot camp experience for these new disciples. They were being tested on their courage it seems.

But let's back up a few hours and see what happened before the disciples were ordered to go out on a boat in stormy weather.

Jesus was in deep mourning over the beheading of John the Baptist as he walked out to Mt. Sinai. He had planned on praying and grieving. But over five-thousand people followed him. So he was compassionate and healed those in the crowd who were ill.

THE GREAT MIRACLE FEEDING

His new disciples told Jesus they were all getting hungry; they suggested he tell the crowd to go home. But instead, Jesus told them to feed the people. Their reaction was surprise. How can we feed them with the little bit of food we have with us?

So Jesus performed the great miracle feeding right there and then and all were fed. He did the impossible for all to see with twelve baskets of food leftover from the feeding. Possibly one basket was left for each of the twelve disciples who needed to have more faith in him.

Then, after showing them they were wrong to underestimate his leadership, he sent everyone away, the crowds *and* the disciples.

THE DISCIPLES DEAL WITH THE RAGING SEA

Jesus retreats to the mountain to pray while his disciples deal with the raging chaos of the sea. I imagine that Jesus prayed to God: "Show me how to teach these doubting disciples to have more faith in me!"

The disciples have been struggling to keep afloat for a while, becoming more and more fearful that they are about to drown. But Jesus waits until the fourth watch of the night (sometime between 3:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m.) before he decides to come to them in the middle of the sea.

Finally, while it is still dark, Jesus makes his appearance walking out towards them. And not surprisingly, the disciples don't recognize Jesus in the midst of the chaos. They have been up all night in the storm. When their energy reserves are almost gone and they are crying out for help, Jesus makes his way out to them.

Over their cries of fear, Jesus calls to them, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear." Jesus reveals himself, not simply as Jesus, their teacher, but as "I AM."

TAKE HEART, I AM, DO NOT BE AFRAID

Carla Works, a professor at Wesley Theological Seminary explains, "If we translate this literally, the phrase would read: "Take heart, *I am*, do not be afraid." Jesus self-reveals where he gets his source of power to walk on the water. He reveals he is the Divine."

In Psalm 89:9, the psalmist says about God, "*You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them.*"

In the midst of the sea's churning, Jesus does what only God can do. Jesus decides the disciples need to see him display his power in a death-defying stunt by walking on the sea. Do you believe it? Could Jesus really do such a thing? If you believe Jesus is God, then there is no reason not to believe he could walk on water if he could create the universe.

Peter believes and he responds with what almost seems like a dare. Peter asks to meet Jesus in the tumult. This passage does not say that Jesus calmed the seas to make Peter's steps easier. In fact, the wind suddenly frightens Peter. His distraction by fear causes him to sink. Jesus' call directs his attention back to Jesus who catches him from going under.

When Peter kept his eyes on Jesus, he was able to be saved. Where in your life do you doubt and let your fears distract you from faith in God? How have you learned to lean on Jesus in the storm of life? These are the kinds of stories I hope we can share with one another. Judy Moore is going to lead a story writing workshop for us in the fall and I hope you will come and share your stories of faith and life so others can be inspired by them.

This story helps to answer the common questions: Why does God allow suffering? Why is there such a thing as fear in the world? Why doesn't God just make everything perfect so we can live without fear?

God wants us to live our lives without succumbing to fear. There are ways we can handle fear and see it as a necessary part of life. If there was no fear or chaos in the world, there would be no appreciation for the days when the seas are calm. We are made stronger when we struggle. Resilience is built up as a result of surviving hardships. Because they haven't learned how to overcome, those who have been pampered all their lives live in fear more than those who have overcome problems.

The disciples were in training and Jesus put them in the midst of chaos to teach them to trust in him and to overcome their fears. Peter learned to keep his eyes on him and not get distracted by the chaos.

That is what we must all do these days! We must not let the news about North Korea cause us to fear, not let the chaos in the world isolate us from others. It would be easy to succumb to fear, isolate away, and never venture out to help others. But deep in our hearts we know that God is calling us to keep our eyes focused on Jesus and obey God's command to 'have no fear.' That is the way to peace. That is the way to have abundant life. Amen

(Norm Smith will lead us in a song we often sing on Thursdays at our Hour of Prayer time that fits today's theme perfectly...."Be Not Afraid.")

Benediction:

Helen Lemmel, the daughter of a Methodist minister, wrote the hymn *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus* in 1922.

It was inspired by a letter she received from a missionary in Algeria who explained how hard it was to maintain focus on God while living in a world of chaos. Lemmel wrote back wonderful advice that I leave with you today:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will
grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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Passages of Assurance of God's Presence

Philippians 4:6-7 – Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

1Peter 5:7 - Cast all your anxieties on God, because God cares for you.

Psalms 23:4 - 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.

Isaiah 43:1-3 - But now, says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, 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.

Hebrews 13:6 - So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can humans do to me?'

Psalms 46: 1-7, 10 - God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea; though the waters roar and foam, and the mountains quake with their surging.....Be still, and know that I am God."

Psalms 56:3 - When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.

Psalms 121:1-2 - I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

Proverbs 3:5-6 - Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge God, and God will make straight your paths.

Romans 8:31 - What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength.
Corrie Ten Boom (Holocaust survivor)

BE NOT AFRAID

**You shall cross the barren desert, but you shall not die of thirst
You shall wander far in safety though you do not know the way
You shall speak your words in foreign lands and all will understand
You shall see the face of God and live**

**Be not afraid
I go before you always
Come follow me, and
I will give you rest**

**If you pass through raging waters in the sea, you shall not drown
If you walk amid the burning flames, you shall not be harmed
If you stand before the power of hell and death is at your side,
know that I am with you through it all**

**Be not afraid
I go before you always
Come follow me, and
I will give you rest**

**Blessed are your poor, for the kingdom shall be theirs
Blessed are you that weep and mourn, for one day you shall laugh
And if wicked men insult and hate you all because of me,
blessed, blessed are you!**

**Be not afraid
I go before you always
Come follow me,
I will give you rest**