

I had a great opening for this sermon when I originally wrote it. But something happened. While I was researching fear, it got in my head. I started thinking about fear. It made me really take stock of my life and especially how I let my fears control me, even guiding me when making certain decisions. I've always said that I am as much an audience to my sermons as those who are listening to it. This sermon got more personal than I wanted it to.. Who doesn't love reading a good thriller or watching a scary movie? Your breathing increases, Your heart races, you have butterflies in your stomach. Just waiting for something to happen. When I was studying for a certification that was required for a job several years back, actually more than several years back. The person leading the class told us that in order to pass we would need to study the whole book; after the groans had died down, the teacher said this- if information is repeated in the course guide several times, that means it is important and that will most likely appear on the test. Life throws tests at us everyday of our lives. "Fear not" Two simple words that, like so many others in the Bible that go unheeded.

The disciples were afraid, many times, but they were very afraid when Jesus wanted to go to Jerusalem that final time. They eventually got what Jesus meant, but did they? THEY were afraid of losing Him, they were not thinking of the big picture. In today's world, the very world that God told us not to conform to, and with so much to fear: war, division, inflation, and more just waiting in the bullpen, as if Satan himself is calling in the next fear "Okay locusts you're up!" Well... maybe not locusts, but it does feel like that doesn't it. How then can a simple 2 word, or 3 word, or 4 word or 5 word phrase help? "Fear Not" "Be not afraid" "Be strong and courageous" "Don't be afraid, just believe" But in those words lie great power. The power of the living God. "But now, this is what the Lord says- fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have summoned you- by name. You. Are. Mine." Isaiah 4:31. And isn't it fitting that those four phrases and many others appear all throughout the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments, almost as if the author of that wonderful book knew of the inclination that we humans have for fear and other shortcomings.

What is fear?

FDR, president Franklin Delano Roosevelt famously said "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." His presidency took place during a very fearful time in our history. FDR was the first and last president to serve more than 2 consecutive terms. He was eventually elected to a fourth term, but did not serve out that term. He served an unprecedented fourth term because our country was still feeling the effects of the great depression and World War II had just begun. It was a very fearful time. Fear has been studied throughout history. Several ancient Greek philosophers had their own take on fear:

Aristotle- He thought fear was the opposite of confidence. The cure for fear was to act in virtuous ways, including being courageous (sound familiar?)

Galen- His goal of existence was to try to reach the ideal "balance" to live a fulfilling inner and outer life. In cases of extreme fear and anxiety, these balances were so off-kilter that some people suffered fears of imaginary things. He felt trembling was caused by bearing too heavy of an emotional burden.

Why do we fear?

I was watching a documentary on Prime called "Heal" and it explained fear very well.

Fear is something that everybody knows intimately. Fear was even necessary as the saber toothed tiger lurked around the encampment. We needed that fear to show us the threat that we were facing was real. That fight or flight response. But now that response is, our spouse, our boss, rent, even an email or phone call. Our bodies still respond in the same way! The adrenaline starts pumping as if it's a life threatening situation. Living with a fight or flight response all the time mobilizes resources from your gut, immune system, and higher brain centers. All those resources going to your muscles to fight for your life. What suffers is your memory, concentration, digestion and your immune system is compromised. We face stress 24/7/365. We hold on to our emotions and this causes density in our bodies, we get weighed down. Matthew 11 tells us "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

What do we fear?

Our top fears are public speaking, heights, bugs and snakes, drowning, needles, flying, claustrophobia, strangers, and zombies just to name a few. Yes, I said zombies. I'll make sure to be afraid of one when I see one. There are just too many fears to list here, some rational, some irrational. But all very real if you happen to have that particular fear. I did have a nasty fear of public speaking. It was paralyzing. I couldn't even talk, it was really hard to give a speech that way. Oral report was a trigger phrase that left my heart racing, my breathing erratic, and my stomach in knots. I finally decided to do something about it. I started a toastmasters club at one of my jobs. It was a comfort to be in such a supportive environment, and that made all the difference. The threat, or perceived threat was mitigated and it allowed me to give speeches and thank goodness the ability to be able to give sermons.

Heights has also been a tough one for me, there was an incident when I was in Key West, FL on my honeymoon, we went to the Key West lighthouse, and Mary scrambled up the rickety looking steps, and I got up about halfway and froze, I literally could not move, I called out to her, and she stopped and looked back at me as I pretended to be one of those motionless street corner performers. She offered to come back down and forget about the lighthouse. But then my ego took over (but that's a whole other sermon.) I took a deep breath and I peeled my hand off the railing and continued up the stairs, which still looked very rickety. Once I got past that I was fine, I even went up the extra set of steps that got led to the very top. I had successfully defeated my saber-toothed tiger. It felt pretty good.

What does it mean to fear the Lord?

Since we are talking about fear, and how the Bible tells us not to fear over and over again. We are told to fear the Lord, that always confused me. But what does it mean to Fear the Lord? Yes, we are told not to fear, we are told to be brave, to be courageous, to believe in him, and all fear will dissipate. We have all read the passages, why, we even look into the bible for our favorite passages when we are struggling, when we are hard pressed on

all sides, when all feels hopeless. When all feels lost. Just to read a simple verse like the one we heard read this morning. A verse that we have heard and have read hundreds of times before. So then why does our faith seem to Peter out? When we fear God, it means we need to do the following-

We need to:

1. Give God our complete attention.
2. Give God our unrivaled awe.
3. Give God our unparalleled allegiance.

It's something we have to keep in our minds daily, if we can have fear on our minds daily, then we can do our best to give God our full attention daily.

Can faith fight fear?

It sure can. In 1 John 5 it says- "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. In 1 Samuel 17 when David fights Goliath. For forty days Goliath called out for a challenger. but no one from the Israelites answered because they were afraid. But David answered the call, he had faith. While protecting the flock David said the Lord had rescued from a Lion, and a Bear, so he had faith that the Lord would protect him from the giant. And he did.

Here's an interesting quote:

"There are only two emotions: love and fear. All positive emotions come from love, all negative emotions from fear. From love flows happiness, contentment, peace, and joy. From fear comes anger, hate, anxiety and guilt. It's true that there are only two primary emotions, love and fear. But it's more accurate to say that there is only love or fear, for we cannot feel these two emotions together, at exactly the same time. They're opposites. If we're in fear, we are not in a place of love. When we're in a place of love, we cannot be in a place of fear." Elisabeth Kubler-Ross.

Obviously love appears many times in the Bible, too. Also a very important topic for our lives. I'm not telling you whatever fears you have are rational or irrational, that's not at all what I intended to do. What I set out to do in this sermon is to tell you, to reaffirm that God loves you, he loves me, he loves all of us.

"To Truly love God, we must surrender every fear, desire, and thought to God."
Christina J. Daniels.

Therefore, to Fear Not, is to choose love and Jesus is Love.

Have faith. Focus on the possibility that you want, don't get sucked into the fear of what you don't want.