

Natalie Bell  
 March 10, 2019  
 First Sunday of Lent

**Facing Our Fears**  
**Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 6:25-34**

*do not fear, for I am with you,  
 do not be afraid, for I am your God;  
 I will strengthen you, I will help you,  
 I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.*

What makes *you scared*?  
 What are you afraid of?

Sometimes my list *seems to grow with each year* of my life....  
 maybe the more of life I see, the more I realize what people should be afraid of...  
**Driving**---my daughter is learning to drive, so I'm more aware of that.  
 I've had 25 years of ministry to see the aftermath of car accidents...  
 I listen to Ed run on MVA's at night....  
 That'll strike fear into your heart.

*As a teen, I didn't have enough fear*---I learned to drive,  
 on my grandma's farm way before I turned 16,  
 so by 16 I was driving all over the state, and sometimes out of state.  
 Crazy.  
 Em asks me to do that and I'll just look at her like she's crazy.  
 Some things you should be afraid of, right?

But then, there are other things that *used to strike fear* into the core of my being,  
 and now I can do them without much anxiety at all.

**Public speaking.**

Believe it or not, in seminary I was leaning more toward social work and  
 chaplaincy—because of the preaching...even though I did well in preaching! So,  
 what did my professors do? They signed me up to preach in chapel!  
 My mouth would be so dry I'd have to peel it off my front teeth.  
 My knees would try to lock up.....now it seems second nature...almost.  
 I still get nervous every week, my stomach does a flip, because I'm carrying what I  
 hope is God's word, not mine. As one of my professors said, if you're not a little  
 nervous about that, you're crazy!

What makes *you scared*?  
And *what do you do* about that fear?

When I think of the fears in my life, I picture the time (the one and only time) that I went *zip-lining!*  
I imagine myself stepping off that telephone pole into thin air....  
closing my eyes, and just hoping I survive!

Do you have some picture in your mind, or a memory—  
that helps you face your fears?  
What does it feel like to you—to face your fears?

Today, we heard *Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount*,  
telling us to not worry or be afraid.  
We heard the prophet *Isaiah* reminding us to not be afraid.

And boy, do we need these words.  
Because we all have fear, don't we?  
And we *live in a time of fear*, right?  
I mean, if we are honest, we could be afraid, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, right?

Did you know if you were to *Google* the word FEAR?  
In less than one second you would find over 600 million entries!  
Apparently a lot of people are afraid, and they have a lot to say about it!

*Fear can be good—*  
fear of falling keeps us from getting too close to the edge of a cliff.  
Fear can save us from danger.  
But much of the time, fear is unhealthy.  
*Fear can paralyze us.*  
*Has it every paralyzed you?*

You know how the *side mirror* on your car says the size of objects is different than they appear?  
Well—isn't that true of our fears?  
Usually the things we fear appear *larger, and closer* than they really are, right?

This happens in the *book of Numbers*, Chapter 13, in the Bible.  
Moses sends 12 men into the Promised Land to scout it out before they enter.

He tells them to go and see what kind of land it is,  
and what the inhabitants are like.

The 12 men explored the land for 40 days, and then returned with a report.

All 12 of the men came back saying the land flowed with milk and honey, and the inhabitants were very strong.

But only two of them—Caleb and Joshua—said *Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.*”

The other **10 were pessimistic**, and afraid.

They said: *We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than us! This land devours its inhabitants; the people are of great size, we seemed like grasshoppers to them.*

**Guess who won** that argument?

Yep—they stayed put, paralyzed by fear, just one mile from the Promised Land,...for the next 38 years!

When have **you been paralyzed** by your fear?

When have you listened to the pessimistic voices around you?

The negative reports?

When have you **been in a group paralyzed** by fear?

I think this **happens in churches**, don't you?

It's so easy to just do what we've always done, not rock the boat, not try anything new or upset anyone....

But what if that means we don't enter the future God has prepared for us?

**Fear is a powerful force** in our world, in our church, and in our lives.

But it doesn't have to rule us.

This year, our Lenten theme is **Do Not Fear**.

And we'll be looking at a great book by Adam Hamilton, called **Unafraid**.

I hope you'll check it out on Amazon, and maybe get your own copy to read along.

Join us for our Sunday school class at 9:30 each week.

And come each week to worship.

Today is the **first Sunday of Lent**, -- the **40** days when we prepare our hearts for the cross and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ on Easter.

The season began this week with **Ash Wednesday**.

The **Ashes** come from the Jewish practice of applying ashes

during confession.

Early Christians began applying ashes during lent to *prepare* for a season of fasting, prayer and repentance.

We observe 40 days because *Jesus himself* began his ministry by going to the desert for 40 days to fast, and it was there that he was tested by Satan.

*Many periods of testing* are marked by the number 40 in the Bible, including the 40 day flood, and the 40 years of the Israelites wandering in wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt.

During Lent we enter our own *desert*, where we are reminded of our *dependence* upon God. The ashes we receive at the beginning remind us that from *dust* we came and to dust we shall return, and that we must die to self, and die to sin, to be alive in Christ Jesus.

All of that can be scary.

Following in the *footsteps of Jesus*—can be scary.

Living in this *world in 2019*—can be scary.

It's easy to be afraid of so many things in our *world today*—

*Crime, terrorism, natural disasters, and war.*

Turn on the TV or your computer for just a few minutes, and you can find all of this, somewhere in the world, right now.

But it's not just fears in our world, is it?

We also have some very personal fears.

We are afraid of things like *loneliness, aging, illness and death, aren't we?*

Most of us are afraid of *failure, and disappointing others, too.*

And it's unfortunately all too easy to be afraid of *people*—

people who don't look or act like us.

people of a different color, faith, politics, sexual orientation, or citizenship status.

Thankfully, God is very clear about fear.

*The Bible is very clear* about fear.

*Over 140* times we are told in scripture : *Do Not Fear!*

Did you know that EVERY time God sends an *angel* he says, Do Not Fear?  
 Did you know that EVERY Time the *risen Jesus* appears he says, Do Not Fear?

Today we hear *Jesus reminding us* in his Sermon on the Mount, to not worry, or fear, about any of our daily needs.

Today we hear from the prophet *Isaiah*, writing to God's people who had been exiled to Babylon:

*do not fear, for I am with you,*

*do not be afraid, for I am your God;*

*I will strengthen you, I will help you,*

*I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. Isaiah 41:10*

If you were to read through all the instances of '*Do Not Fear*' in the Bible,

Do you know what is the *common thread*?

It's just one reason we do not need to fear:

it's the *presence of God*.

Because *God is with us*, we do not need to be afraid.

Because *God is on our side*, we do not need to fear.

*God is our protection against fear.*

2 Timothy 1 puts it this way, *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

The *Love of God is greater than any fear.*

In I John 4 it says, *There is no fear in love, because perfect love casts out fear.*

And you know what's amazing?

God is *ALWAYS with us*---ALWAYS by our side.

So, we don't EVER need to fear!

Think about that for a minute, what if we were to believe that?

*God does NOT want us to EVER be afraid!*

Jesus does not want us to fall prey to all the negative things that fear can lead to.

To let go of fear isn't easy---we have to *surrender* it to God.

We have to *allow the Holy Spirit* to work in us, driving out our fears.

I don't think we can just talk ourselves out of our fears.

We need God's help to take them away from us,

and sometimes that's a daily, or even an hourly, surrender.

In our Lenten study book *Unafraid* by Adam Hamilton, he talks about facing our fears—with our faith!

What does that *look like in your life?*  
How do you *use your faith* to face your fears?

He specifically mentions the power—the *very real power--*  
Of *spiritual practices* to face our fear.

What are spiritual practices?  
Spiritual practices are things like praying, reading the Bible, studying Scripture, singing hymns, worship, walking and talking with God.  
Even just calling upon the name of Jesus for help,  
or praying a 'breath prayer' like I did with the kids today!  
That is power—very real power!

Which of these things *helps you deal* with your fear?  
What helps you *experience the power of the presence of God?*

Doing something like a spiritual practice is important—  
we *can't just think* about our faith,  
it's not enough to *just believe*—  
we need to *put that belief into action*, don't we?

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said,  
*"Do the thing we fear, and the death of fear is certain"*.

So, what if we held up our beliefs and our actions  
*against the FACTS of scripture?*  
That's why passages about fear in the Bible are so important.  
Isn't THAT a Google search worth doing--- *"Bible verses about fear"*.  
What if we were to commit THOSE to memory?  
Wouldn't that be life changing? I sure think so!

*There are some great verses* out there, like Psalm 56:3-4:  
*O Most High,<sup>3</sup> when I am afraid,*  
*I put my trust in you.*  
*<sup>4</sup>In God, whose word I praise,*

*in God I trust; I am not afraid;  
what can flesh do to me?*

Or verses like, **Philippians 4:6-7** which says, *Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

The silent film actress Dorothy Bernard once said  
“*Courage is fear that has said it’s prayers*”

Adam Hamilton, *Unafraid: Living with Courage and Hope in Uncertain Times*, Covergent, New York, 2018, pg. 38.

Hamilton uses an **acronym of F.E.A.R.** to talk about overcoming fear.

F---Face fear with faith

E---Examine assumptions with facts

A---Attack anxiety with action

R---Release cares to God

Adam Hamilton, *Unafraid: Living with Courage and Hope in Uncertain Times*, Covergent, New York, 2018, pg. 27.

Have you ever thought about using faith? And facts? And action this way?  
Have you given some thought to the power of fear in your life?  
Have you *pictured your life WITHOUT* that fear?

Some Christians choose to ‘*give up*’ something during Lent.

We do this because it helps us see how broken we are,  
and how much we depend on whatever we are giving up.

Whether it’s television or Facebook or junk food,

we all have things we use to try and feel happy—instead of God.

***During Lent, each time*** we find ourselves relying on something instead of God,  
we pray.

So we might have things we want to *give up* during these 40 days.

But, what if we all committed to *give up FEAR*?

We sure won’t have a hard time finding it in our hearts and lives!

What if every time we came across something that makes us anxious or afraid—  
we *surrendered it, at that moment, with a prayer to God?*

Even a simple prayer, like: ***Do not Fear, for I Am With You.***

What if every time we thought about something that brings fear—  
we made a *note of it, and literally tore it up?*  
And what if we then prayed a simple prayer, like, *God's love casts out fear.*

Friends, hear the *Good News of the Gospel*,  
We are invited, in the name of Jesus Christ, to observe a holy Lent,  
And this year, may we do that---*By GIVING UP FEAR.*  
And to that, all God's people said, Amen.