

## ***I Want To Be Fearless***

**Message for January 14, 2018**

**North East United Methodist Church**

**Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian**

Last weekend, I traveled with our youth to Ocean City for the Annual Peninsula-Delaware Youth Rally. One of the speakers and musicians was Jasmine Murray. Jasmine sang a song that resonated with me, with where I am, with what I'm struggling with.

*She sang, "Everything I've been fighting against, I'm going to lift it up. I won't be afraid. I'll call on your name and I'll walk out on faith. I want to be fearless."*

Fear. A Gallup Poll researched what scares Americans most. The results were:

1. Snakes
2. Public Speaking
3. Heights
4. Being closed in a small space
5. Spiders
6. Needles and getting shots
7. Mice
8. Flying on an airplane
9. Dogs
10. Thunder and lightning
11. Going to the doctor
12. The dark

I guess we are all afraid of something. I remember staying up on Saturday nights with my dad as a kid and watching Creature Feature. My dad loved those old horror movies. We would sit and watch The Blob, Frankenstein, The Wolfman, The Creature from the Black Lagoon, Them, Tarantula, and Dracula. I now have over 140 of these old horror/Sci-Fi films in my collection.

I'm not sure if any of these films scared me as a kid; I know they don't scare me now. I enjoy escaping into the world of monsters and aliens from distant planets, watching the mighty Rodan awaken from underground or the Invisible Man remove his bandages to escape his pursuers.

The monsters of these old films don't scare me; in fact, for most of us, it's not monsters we are scared of...

The things that scare me...that I struggle with...are much less tangible...you can't run from them...most of the time you can't see them...they don't shake the ground when they walk...they are not something you can fight with an army of tanks or a host of angry villagers with pitchforks...

The fear that I do battle with is the unknowing...

The unknowing...

The last year, I have struggled as I moved to a new church, a new home, new relationships...this was the first Youth Rally in over a decade one of my boys wasn't with me...

I now look at another year of tremendous change...my oldest graduating college, my youngest graduating high school...My oldest getting married...

With so much happening and about to happen, it is easy for fear to rear its ugly head, filling my head with questions...

How will it all work out? What kind of life will my boys have? Will my boys live close? Will I see them often? How will our relationship change? How will Deb and I deal with the “empty-nest”? What do the years ahead hold for us? Have I been a good father?

I’m afraid of what I cannot see...the unknowing...the future...

I battle this fear constantly when it comes to my writing...a dozen books in my head...ready to come out...the words ready to be put on paper...but I hesitate...afraid...what if no one reads my words...what if every publisher says “no”...what if I fail...

But I know...what another group at the Youth Rally shared is true...*“Fear destroys more dreams than failure ever has...What God calls you to is always on the other end of fear...”*

God says, *“Do not be afraid...Take Courage”*...and calls me to walk through the fear, into the future...to allow God to lead me to places I cannot see, cannot plan for, cannot even imagine...to trust Him...

I know this is true for every time I have walked through the fear I have found God in all His fullness on the other side...getting married, having children, entering the ministry, moving to a new church, starting my doctorate...all times the fear was real and on the other side of that fear was tremendous blessing....

And the greatest fear we must one day walk through...death itself...will lead us to our greatest blessing...eternal life...

Isn't this what we see throughout scripture?

Moses—reluctant to leave behind the safety of his shepherd life in the backcountry of Midian to answer God's call to go back to Egypt and confront the mighty pharaoh with God's command to free the Israelites (Exodus 3 & 4)

The Ten Scouts—who didn't trust God to lead them into the promised land of Canaan, thus causing the Israelites to waste 40 years in the wilderness before finally being allowed to enter Canaan (Numbers 13 & 14)

Jonah—who ran away from God and the mission to preach to the people of Nineveh (Jonah 1 & 2)

The Rich Young Ruler - who was afraid and unwilling to give up the comfort of his wealthy lifestyle to follow Jesus (Luke 18:18-23)

The Disciples - who abandoned Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter who denied he knew Jesus three times

And what about Gideon...

Time and again, Gideon acts out of fear. When we first meet Gideon in the Book of Judges, he's down in a hole, hiding from the Midianites. God tells Gideon to tear down an idol that has been erected in his village. Gideon does so... at night, because he's afraid. The next day the villagers come to Gideon's house, and Gideon hides in the house while his father convinces the crowd not to harm his son.

Even Jesus...in the garden...the cross slowly drawing its shadow over him...Jesus prayed, "*Father, if you are willing take this cup from me; yet, not my will, but yours be done.*"

Aren't we glad Jesus stepped through the fear to what was on the other side? Grace. Forgiveness. Eternal Life. The World was never the same.

Moses, The Israelites, Jonah, the Rich Young Ruler, the Disciples, Gideon, and so many others...once they trusted God, pushed through the fear, were blessed and were a blessing to others...

*"What God calls you to is always on the other side of fear" ...Our story...the story God is writing with our lives...is on the other side of fear...God says, "Do not be afraid...Take courage."*

Fear is a reaction...whereas courage is a decision...You and I must choose to face our fears, to face the unknown, to step into the future trusting in the One who goes before us...

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote,

*But the human being doesn't have to be afraid; we should not be afraid! That is what makes humans different from all other creatures. In the midst of every situation where there is no way out, where nothing is clear, where it is our fault, we know that there is hope, and this hope is called: Thy will be done, yes, thy will is being done. "This world must fall, God stands above all, his thoughts unswayed, his Word unstayed, his will forever our ground and hope."*

*Then we name the name of the One who makes the evil inside us recoil, who makes fear and anxiety themselves tremble with fear and puts them to flight. We name the One who overcame fear and led it captive in the victory procession, who nailed it to the cross and committed it to oblivion; we name the One who is the shout of victory of humankind redeemed from the fear of death—Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Living One. He alone is Lord over fear; it knows him as its master; it gives way to him alone. So look to Christ when you are afraid, think of Christ, keep him before your eyes, call upon Christ and pray to him, believe that he is with you now, helping you . . .*

*Then fear will grow pale and fade away, and you will be free, through your faith in our strong and living Savior, Jesus Christ.*

This is true for the church as well as each of us individually. As a church we must step through the fear to what is on the other side...we must allow God to write our story...to write the next chapters. We must not be afraid of change, knowing that we can trust the One whose church this is...this is a choice...as a “*body of Christ*” we must choose to face the future with courage, to trust, to fight through the fears that would hold us stagnant, that would keep us from going with God into the next chapter...

It is easy to want to stay where we are because we know where we are...it is comfortable...we have a sense of control...but God’s Word is clear...we cannot stay where we are and go with God...

God calls us to follow Him through the fear into the unknown remembering His words through the prophet, “*For I know the plans I have for you,*” declares the Lord, “*plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future*” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Jesus’ words should bring us great comfort when the future looks uncertain...

*Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all[b]; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.*

-John 10:25-29

Nothing can "*snatch*" us out of the Father's hand.

I remember helping my boys cross a busy street or hike the cliffs in Shenandoah when they were young. I held their hand. I never depended upon their grip even though I would tell them to "hold on tightly." I depended upon my grip on their hand. If they fell, I would be the one who would pull them up. If a car suddenly appeared around the corner, it would be my grip that would pull my son to safety.

It is not our grip on God that keeps us safe. It is God's grip on us. The hands that shaped the mountains and oceans and placed the stars in the night sky hold us. Paul writes in Romans 8:39, "*Nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

When the unknown is looming over you, hear Jesus' words...

"...*no one is able to snatch*" YOU "*out of the Father's hand.*" If you have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, be assured that He has His hand on you. God has you in His grip and He can be trusted.

Last weekend, at the Youth Rally, one of the singers sang the words, "*I found the courage when I left love there in the stars.*"

I have had a tough time this past year for I have failed to lift my fears to God...leaving them "*there in the stars*"...I have held on to them...brooded over them...allowed those fears to paralyze me at times...

Perhaps some of you can relate...and you are having a difficult time...caught up in your fears of tomorrow...the unknowing...because you, too, have not stopped and lifted those fears to God...leaving them “*there in the stars*”...

Invitation