

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

February 12, 2017

“More Than Conquerors”

Whom Shall I Fear, part 1

Romans 8:31-38

(Show Barakel highlight reel)

I want to start by thanking you all for being so welcoming to Rev. Devon last week, and for praying for our youth group as we went on retreat last weekend at Camp Barakel. We had an excellent time, and the speaker really hit home with the kids, talking about entertainment and social media. I had a parent tell me this week, “My son asked if he could stay up past bedtime and read his bible instead of playing video games.” That’s a testimony. I am very proud of how our teens represented our church.

I invite you to pray with me this morning before we explore God’s word. If you are comfortable doing so, pray with your hands open, as a symbol that you are ready to receive the blessing God has in store for you.

Holy, Awesome, Powerful God, we humble ourselves before you this morning. Speak words of life to us. Let your Spirit come upon us and take away our fears and replace them with the assurance of your love for us. We open our ears, our minds, and our hearts to you this morning. Come and fill us with your love. And may the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O God, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

[Picture] The year was 1933. War was threatening in Europe. America was in the throngs of the Great Depression. Newly elected President Franklin Delano Roosevelt took the podium at his inauguration on Capitol Hill to reassure a fearful nation. Not many people knew him well, and honestly, they were uncertain what

he would say. Their previous experiences under Herbert Hoover had left them disgruntled, dismayed, and disappointed. Would this new president lead through the dark times?

FDR began with this statement, “This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly.” He went on to utter a line that echoes throughout history. Say it with me if you know it. “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”¹ He talked about the fears of the nation, which he pointed out were mostly material fears of our own making. He went on to outline his plan for national economic recovery. Roosevelt encouraged the nation to be united and work together, to be disciplined and make sacrifices. And he made this promise: “For the trust reposed in me I will return the courage and the devotion that befit the time. I can do no less.”

Now here’s a disclaimer – this is not a political sermon. I am not here today to talk about presidents and economies, policies and executive orders. But I point to 1933 as evidence that fear is a common enemy that has always existed wherever and whenever people have lived. Today is no different. And courage in the face of fear is needed as much today as it was in 1933.

The next three weeks we are going to examine what the Bible has to say about fear. I want to start by working on a memory verse with you. It comes in two parts, and we are going to learn the first part today. It’s on the front of your bulletin. *[Slide]* Psalm 27:1. Go ahead and say it with me a couple of times. “The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?” Good. We’ll work on the second part next week.

¹ <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5057/>

As I read the national and international news lately, it seems that a lot of people are afraid. We are acting a little bit like this guy: *[Faith versus Fear clip.]*

I know. We've all had those days. I'll make you a deal: I'll tell you some of my fears if you share some of yours. Here are some of mine: I'm afraid of getting injured permanently. When I cut my finger two years ago, I feared I would never play piano again. Last year, I had a minor surgery, and as I was going under for the first time in my adult life, I wondered if I would wake back up. I have been unemployed and worried about my family and our future. But honestly, one of the biggest fears I have (and don't mind admitting) is that my fear of letting someone down who is relying on me.

OK. Your turn. What are you afraid of? I'm going to give you exactly one minute to name your biggest fears in a group of no more than four people. When I call you back, we'll get the best answers from the whole room. Ready? Go.

[Use countdown timer. Allow time for groups to share.]

What did you come up with? *(Take a few answers.)*

Some fears are natural, others are the result of our own doing. Fears are common in times of transition, such as we are in now.

For example, my two oldest children are going to live in Germany next year. People keep asking me if I am afraid to let them go. Yes, I am. But that fear does not prevent me from letting them have a potentially incredible experience.

How can we conquer our fears? We could take a cue from the scouts who are here this morning. The Scout Law declares that a scout is BRAVE. Why? Because a scout does not face fear alone. Scouts have the pack and their leaders. A child, in strange and even dangerous situation, will cling to their parent, their

leader, their protector – in scout terms, their “Akela.” In the same way, we don’t have to be afraid because we have access to our heavenly Akela: God.

[Slide] Take a look at what Paul says in Romans 8:31. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Paul spells out what our leader did for us. God gave up his own son, Jesus, to rescue us from sin and death. And Paul knows that God is willing to give us everything we need. Look at verse 32. God “graciously gives us all things.” That’s some pretty bold words. That’s victory in the face of fear.

I don’t know how much you know about the Apostle Paul. He was a pretty fearless man. As an early Christian missionary he traveled all over the Roman world to proclaim Christ. If anyone knew about hardships and danger, it was Paul. In 2nd Corinthians 11, you can find just a partial list of his troubles: prison, beatings, shipwrecks, bandits, hunger, sleep deprivation, betrayal by his own people, and hypothermia. When Paul says in Romans 8:35, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” he is speaking from personal experience!

OK, some of you are thinking, “Yeah, but he was Paul. The Apostle. God spoke to him. Of course he trusted in God.” There’s more. King David had to flee from King Saul and hide in caves, just to save his own life. David wrote Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd. I have everything I need.” (Psalm 23:1). David also wrote our memory verse in Psalm 27. “The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear?” It’s like he’s trying to tell us something. God saved him from his fears!

There are plenty other stories of people in the Bible who were afraid yet trusted God. My personal favorite is the disciples and Jesus on the boat, especially Mark’s version of it. Let me read it for you. (Mark 4:35-41.)

³⁵That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." ³⁶Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. ³⁷A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

³⁹He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

⁴⁰He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

⁴¹They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

The irony of this story is that after Jesus performed the miracle, the disciples were still terrified! What they had thought was their most immediate concern - the storm - turned out to be secondary. Their fear of circumstances changed to a holy fear of Jesus himself, and rightly so.

This is the truth the disciples learned, and the truth the Apostle Paul is trying to tell us: *[Slide]* If we hold on to our fears, they hold on to us. If we give them over to God, God defeats them for us.

So what is our choice in the face of fear? What if we are afraid for our futures, the direction of our country, or even the safety of our family and our own lives? I believe we have three options. We can panic, we can fight, or we can have faith.

[Chicken Little option – video clip]

If you've ever flown in an airplane, you might have encountered some turbulence. And maybe you've reacted like Chicken Little. "Run! We're all going to die!" At which point, hopefully, the attendants came over to subdue you.

Panicking is not a response of faith. And it never helps you in your situation, anyway.

The second option is to fight your fear with every possible ounce of your strength, and with every possible resource. *[Croods clip]*

This choice leaves you exhausted, and odds are, you don't make any headway with your problem. Can you imagine, on an airplane, standing up, telling the other passengers, "I've got this!" barging into the cockpit, and telling the pilot you are taking over? Again, not an optimal choice. That's more likely to get you tasered.

No, clearly the option God wants us to choose is to trust Him, and be prepared to do what God asks you to do. In the pocket in front of every airplane seat is this little safety booklet that tells you to look for the exits, how to use oxygen masks, and how to open emergency doors. So you take it out, you study it, and you also realize that the odds are, if something were to happen, it would be out of your control, anyway. And that's actually OK. We can resolve to let God be God. We can make it through some turbulence, folks. It's going to be OK.

Let me read you Paul's victory speech one more time. (Romans 8:35-39)

³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I don't often use illustrations from sports, but last Sunday, when the score of the Super Bowl was 28-3 Falcons, I turned off the game. "It's over," I thought. "The Patriots lost." You know what happened. Tom Brady and his team scored 31 unanswered points and won the game. The Patriots won on the last play, a touchdown that could have been reviewed, but wasn't. It actually makes some fans wonder if their victory was legitimate.

But Paul does not question the victory we won in Christ. It has been reviewed for 2000 years and it is still upheld. We are more than conquerors in this life.

Be honest with yourself. Do you have that victory? Do you know what it means to completely trust in the love of Jesus in any circumstance? Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. No earthquake, no financial crisis, no election, no flood, no famine, no war, no fire, no sickness...nothing. Heaven, hell, demons, angels, dictators, presidents, kings and queens, family, the tallest mountain, the deepest canyon, the widest ocean...not even death itself can stop God's love from reaching and saving and keeping us because of Jesus Christ.

If you don't know that security in the midst of chaos, I promise you, you can have it right here, right now. All you have to do is call on the name of Jesus Christ and you will be saved. It is God's promise to us all that he will never leave us, never forsake us, and always give us exactly what we need, if we just trust him. Let's pray.

Memory verse

Psalm 27:1 – "The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life — of whom shall I be afraid?"

Reflection questions

1. Name some of your biggest fears as a child. What are your biggest fears now?
2. How do your struggles compare to some of the things Paul went through?
(See 2 Corinthians 11:22-33)
3. How many of your fears are things that honestly are of your own creation?
How many of them are things beyond your control?
4. How does Jesus' sacrifice prove that God will support you in all difficulties?
5. Try meditating on Psalm 27:1 this week. Post a note on your mirror where you will see it every morning.