

DO NOT FEAR

Hebrews 13:6

As we make our way through the book of Hebrews, this morning we are up to Hebrews 13:6. So let's turn to that...

Hebrews 13:6

We should thank God, every day, that we live in America. We are SO blessed. And while I cannot speak specifically to your experience, my guess is that your experience has not been all that different from my own.

- I have never gone to bed truly fearing that someone might break into the house
- I have never gone to bed listening to the gunfire of gangs or warring forces
- I have never been shot at, had a gun held to my head or a knife to my throat
- Indeed the most violent events in my life would be a couple school ground brawls going back to 5th or 6th grade.

So I have not lived in fear. And yet, I wonder just how much FEAR dominates our society?

More than 10 years ago I was at the county courthouse sitting in on a church member's trial. For the life of me I can't recall who it was or what they had done. But what I do remember was that there was a recess for lunch. A friend from the church had, just weeks before, shown me a "concealed weapons permit" that he had obtained at the sheriff's office and at that time suggested it was quite easy and inexpensive to obtain. Though, at that time I did not own any pistols, I thought I would see just how easy it would be to obtain a license. So during that lunch recess I went from the courtroom to the second floor sheriff's office. Walking in I approached the counter and said, "I'm possibly interested in obtaining a concealed..." I didn't even finish the sentence before the woman behind the counter said, "Fill this out and hand it in."

She handed me a blank form on a clipboard along with a pen. Around the room were probably 10 chairs and most of them were filled with people filling out forms. I filled mine out, handed it in, and was told it would take a few minutes. During that time I went out to the street and put more money in the parking meter. Upon returning to the room I was almost immediately called and told to sit in front of a camera. The county sheriff was the one taking the photo. I asked him, "All these people...are they here for the same reason?" He said yes. And then I said, "Is it like this all the time...this busy?" And he said, "All the time." In my mind I started doing some calculations and I figured that there must be a person with a concealed weapons permit in at least one out of every three homes in Lancaster County.

I got mine out of curiosity. But I wonder how many got theirs out of fear?

Furthermore I have not lived in fear of loss of a job, or housing, or a wife. Nor have I lived in fear of ghosts, goblins or zombies.

For many years following its initial 1968 release, the film "The Night of the Living Dead" was banned from being shown on television. It was considered to be that gruesome and frightening. Today – 50 years later – shows like "The Walking Dead" are far more graphic and intense than "The Night of the Living Dead." We are able to watch these newer releases because we have become accustomed to sitting through these shows and films. What scared us 50 years ago doesn't scare us so much today.

Fear.

What do we fear? What do YOU fear? What can give YOU a sleepless night?

When you are a younger adult, the list of items that can greatly trouble you tend to be things tied to finances:

- loss of a job
- a bad job review
- an unexpected repair bill
- Or possibly items related to a pregnancy or children.

When much older, the list of items tends to be related to health issues:

- a previously unknown pain
- medical test results that don't look good
- the need for surgery or chemotherapy

And while we all know that WORRYING over these things does nothing to make the situation better, we tend to worry. Even as Christians we tend to worry. Indeed, we can tend to worry EVEN AS WE ARE QUOTING "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known unto God" (Philippians 4:5). That is to say, even though we **KNOW** what the Bible says, we still tend to be anxious, we still tend to worry, and we still tend to show signs of being afraid.

My experience has been, having spent many, many hours with those who are very old, that this sort of anxiousness or fear tends to eventually go away. I've been with some who were well into their 90's or older, and based upon what I could see they didn't fear anything. Death had no hold over them. Indeed, some looked forward to the day of their death (and I have seen this in some much younger as well). Billy Graham, long before his actual death, commented that he had no fear of death, though he did not look forward to the dying process. All of this to say that, at least in the life of those who have made their peace with God through the blood of Christ, there appears to come a point where the things that bothered us as younger believers (childbirth issues, the health of our family, holding on to a steady job, paying our bills) are no longer issues. And as our personal health is the only thing left (prior to death), and we have come to accept the bad with the good, we become much more bold...much stronger.

There are a few lessons that we might learn from this:

1. That if there comes a time in our life when we no longer fret over issues of money, job security or the health of our family members, then can we not learn to no longer fret over these issues NOW? That is, if worrying really does accomplish nothing, then can we learn to let go of it now?

I have never, in being with someone who was dying, heard them bemoan that they wished they had earned more money. I have never heard that. So if come the end of life we don't think on such things why are we consumed with these things now?

2. (Related to this first point) If as we near the end of life we can be bold, why can we not be bold today? What **seems to hold us back** now is some fear...some angst...that we may not do well. It is a **fear of failure**. It seems to me we are far too careful, both individually and as a church.

3. Psychologists say that the **fear of death** is the greatest fear that afflicts humanity. It is that very fear that according to Hebrews 2:14-15 Christ has conquered. So at least we don't have to deal with that any more!

Well, let's get into our verse for the day...

Hebrews 13:6

1. Consider the context

This is a direct quote from Psalm 118:6. Quoted here, in Hebrews 13, it is found within the context of the author having addressed the issue of money (v.5). As already noted, fear over money issues tends to be found most often (though not exclusively) among those who are younger: for growing families feeling the pinch of a mortgage, a car loan, and a child needing braces (for example). So within that context, quoting Psalm 118:6 makes sense.

Be free from the love of money
Be content with what you have
Know that the Lord will never leave you or forsake you, so
Don't live in fear

We get that. It makes sense. God is with us so we don't need to fear what may be coming down the pike.

Matthew 6:25-34

Here, three times in this text, Jesus tells his disciples to not be anxious...to not fear. We may face some real challenges. We may literally come to a place where we are not sure where the next meal is coming from. But it is highly, highly unlikely we will die. God is with us. His church is behind us. We'll get through this. So let's not fear. As I have said through the years, "If you are part of this church, you are not going to starve."

2. Consider our adversaries: men

Psalm 118:6 – here quoted in Hebrews 13:6 – implies that what we might **really fear** is not the loss of a job, or some health concern, but it is men and what men might do to us.

Though Ruth doesn't like him, I have always liked the actor Tom Cruise. I like him for the kind of person he usually portrays: a fellow who is **self-confident** and approaches life aggressively. He comes across as the kind of fellow who when he walks into a room is **not intimidated by the others in the room**. If there is a fear of those in the room, he doesn't show it.

It seems to me that that is how we should be: confident before others.

In the U.S., the likelihood that we are going to face ANYBODY who is going to do us actual harm **because of our faith** is very remote. In that sense the application of Hebrews 13:6 to OUR lives seems almost impossible to make for that verse implies that men may wish to harm us.

Now, take us to Pakistan, or North Korea, or Iran and that may be a very different story. In those countries (and about 50 others as well) there ARE people who would, if they could, quickly harm us or even kill us. But in the U.S.? Hardly

The Independent Church in India – a mission organization that this church supports – put out a newsletter recently in which they told the story of Pastor John, from Punjab, India. Along with his story was a photograph of him with his eyes covered by large bandages. A man opposed to his preaching the gospel confronted him and threw some sort of liquid – acid or bleach – in his face. It has blinded him (and thus the patches). Burning Hearts has sent money to help defray the cost of an operation that may result in him getting back at least some of his eyesight. How would you like to be a Christian or especially a Christian pastor in that country?

So what are we afraid of here?

As you know, I go door to door on most Saturday mornings. I understand that it may not be for everybody. Even for me, it would be a lot easier NOT to go out. At the 4,000 plus homes that I have knocked on their front door, through the years, I can only think now of 4 or 5 times when I was treated in a very unfriendly way. What is that? 1/10th of 1% of the homes? That means that 99.9% of the time I am at least treated cordially and sometimes I am greeted WARMLY! How different life in America (and maybe Lancaster County in particular) is than life in some of these other countries!

So what are we afraid of here?

We have a political system that allows us to vote in or vote out those that we don't like. Back in the days of the Bible, Herod – the same Herod, king of Judea, who had the baby boys, aged 2 and under, killed when he learned from the wise men about the birth of one who would be "king of the Jews" – well consider Herod's legacy...

- Though he had 9 or 10 wives (concurrently) he had his favorite wife, Mariamne, put to death because of a suspicion of infidelity
- He went on to have Mariamne's two brothers, Aristobulus and Alexander also put to death
- Just five days before his own death he ordered his own son, Antipater, to be slain.
- Herod's legacy for killing those around him was so well known that Caesar Augustus said of Herod, "It is better to be Herod's pig than to be his son!"
THAT is cruelty; THAT is a despot.

Or what of the likes of men like Mao Zedong in China, Adolf Hitler in Germany, Joseph Stalin in Russia or Pol Pot in Cambodia...to whom each are credited with the death of millions of people? These are the kind of rulers we have known nothing about here in America.

When I was in seminary, **Idi Amin** was in power in Uganda. Over a million deaths are attributed to him. Several assassination attempts had been made upon Amin's life by that point. What a surprise it was to hear my faculty advisor, Dr. Philip Edgcomb Hughes, upon us entering into a time of prayer one day, suggest that maybe we would do well to pray to God that in regards to Idi Amin someone be a better shot!

Christians had good reason to think their life might be in danger under Idi Amin. But we don't face anything like that.

In Matthew 5:10 Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Again, in America, this is something we have not yet faced. I **used to think** that I would face it in my lifetime...and maybe I still will. But with each year that passes, and for all the legislation that gets handed down that appears to be going against the church and against Christian faith, I still see plenty of hope that our nation will not deteriorate to the point that Christians are beat up, locked up, or strung up solely because of their faith in Jesus.

Back in 1971 three young guys got together and started a line of clothing branded "No Fear." Their company grew and grew until 2011 when they filed for bankruptcy (I wonder if they had any sleepless, fearful nights during that time?). Back when our kids were younger this "No Fear" brand was quite popular and so it was that one summer, while taking plain t-shirts and using fabric paint on them, I took a black shirt (the shirt I am wearing today...yes...in place of a white shirt and tie) and using some of that paint painted a skull and cross bones on it. But instead of the words NO FEAR beneath (such as one might have found on a No Fear brand shirt) I put the words FEAR GOD. And it's glow in the dark paint!

And what was the basis for that? Probably my most favorite section of scripture in the entire Bible...

Matthew 10:26-33

This is the teaching of Hebrews 13:6. God has our life in his hands...or as Hebrews 13:6 puts it, "The LORD is my helper." Given that, what can anyone do to us? If not even a small bird falls to the ground apart from the will of our Father in heaven, then no gunshot, no knife, no sucker punch is going to land on me apart from that same Father's will. We are, in the words of the old hymn, "Safe in the arms of Jesus."

When Promise Keepers was in full swing, they were putting out some good songs...songs that a congregation could sing. One of those was a song entitled, Be Bold, Be Strong by Morris Chapman. The words to that song are:

Be bold, be strong
For the Lord your God is with you
Be bold, be strong
For the Lord your God is with you
I am not afraid
I am not dismayed
Because I'm walking in faith an victory
Come on and walk in faith and victory
For the Lord your God is with you.

That's the teaching of scripture.

The challenge to "be bold and be strong" was the challenge God gave to Moses, and then Moses gave to Joshua. It's the same challenge that David gave to Solomon. And it is the same challenge that God gives to us all.

So don't be afraid of men,
And don't be afraid of your circumstances.
Fear GOD and know that he will take care of you!