

Sermon – September 6, 2020
“Focused On Today”
Crown of Life Lutheran Church
Pastor Dave Schilling

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Let's pray, "O Lord, speak to each of us wherever Your love finds us this morning, speak to us in our minds, speak to us in our hearts, speak to us by the words of my mouth, and in the thoughts we form. Speak, O Lord, we, your servants, are listening. Amen

Welcome back! Today is our 3rd week in our “Fear Not” series. So far, we have talked about the difference between healthy and unhealthy fear. We know that God does not give us a spirit of fear but rather a spirit of power, love, and self-control.

We also learned that fear has a proper place. Can anyone here today tell me where fear, anxiety, worry, and doubt belong?

Today you are in for a treat as we're going to look at one of the most important lessons Jesus taught his original followers. This is a teaching that we cannot miss, and its lifelong importance cannot be understated.

Simply put, as followers of Christ, we are called to be FOCUSED ON TODAY.

As we begin, we need to remind ourselves that the opportunities for fear are at historically high levels. It is well documented that people are struggling in these areas as much right now as they ever have.

The current climate only makes Jesus' words more wonderful to hear when he says...

“...do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” Matthew 6:34

So, where does that leave us? Obviously, it leaves us with the day at hand. It allows us to be focused on today, and to deal appropriately with every circumstance and situation that comes up.

I don't know about you, but I find this reality to be incredibly freeing. Let's take a moment to review the highlights of what Jesus said about fear in our Gospel lesson from Matthew Chapter 6...

“...do not worry about your life ... can you add a single hour to your life by worrying ... your heavenly Father knows your needs ... seek first His kingdom and all these things will be given to you as well ... do not worry about tomorrow...” Matthew 6:25-27, 31-34

Jesus is teaching us that life is MORE important than the food you eat, the clothes you wear, the vacation you might take next month, the size of your retirement account, your zip code, or anything else you might currently be concerned with.

In fact, God believes you are of so much value that He sent His one and only son to die and

suffer in your place so that you might spend eternity with Him. The Father doesn't want you wasting one second of this precious life paralyzed by unhealthy fear.

He is willing to take it all on, and if you remember back to last week's sermon, that's the secret that Paul learned. The secret about fear is that fear belongs in the hands of God - not your hand.

Remember these words from Paul...

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer ... with thanksgiving present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6-7

Now today, Jesus is clearly saying that you DO NOT need to fear. In fact, fear is a WASTE of your eternally valuable time and energy.

You may remember that the command "Fear Not" appears in one form or another 365 times from Genesis to Revelation. Many commentators marvel that God gave us this specific exhortation for every single day of the year.

You could literally make a calendar with a different "Fear Not" verse just to remind yourself throughout the year.

Here are just a couple examples...

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you ... I have called you by name, you are mine." Isaiah 43:1

"Fear not, for I am with you ... I will strengthen you, I will help you ... I will uphold you..." Isaiah 41:10

I want to turn your attention now to something Jesus says in the Lord's Prayer also found in Matthew Chapter 6...

"This then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.'" Matthew 6:9-11

Jesus reminds us of a couple key things here. First, our God is holy and worthy of our reverence. His will on earth is what we need. And secondly, we need Him to give us our "daily bread," our daily nourishment and sustenance.

Many of us consume a daily portion of fear, and when you throw in anxiety, worry, and doubt, you could say we are filling ourselves with "junk food". And we all know where a steady diet of junk food leaves us.

So, before we move on, we need to fully understand what Jesus is saying in Matthew 6. He is telling us not to worry about tomorrow, it has enough trouble of its own. He is also telling us to pray, and specifically ask God for the daily food and nourishment that we need. Even His advice on prayer is focused on our practical everyday needs.

You see, God is not only the creator of the entire cosmos, He's also your heavenly Father. And He cares for your well-being. He knows that every single day brings along with it an ample amount of trouble, including things to be afraid of, worried about, and anxious over.

I believe this is why He gave us all those daily reminders to "Fear Not."
I believe this is why He reminds us to specifically ask for our daily bread, and I believe this is why we are told to stay focused on today.

God knows that one day at a time is enough of a challenge for us.

I said earlier that I thought this was all incredibly FREEING, and I want to elaborate on that a bit before we close our message. To do that ... to feel free ... I need to take you back to what we have learned about fear the past couple of Sundays.

First, we talked about the difference between healthy and unhealthy fear.

Then, we talked about putting fear in its proper place ... into the hands of God Almighty.

When you add those things to what we are learning from Jesus today, I think we can begin to see how fear can be overcome. With some self-discipline and confidence in the process, you can take fear, and put it in its PROPER place knowing that your RESPONSIBILITY is to be focused on today.

You do not have to be consumed with what MIGHT happen tomorrow, or the next month, or when the kids go off to college. You are too valuable, and your time on earth is too precious, to be lost to future fears that truly, you do not have control of anyhow.

Speaking of having no control, last Sat I was reviewing and making final edits to my PPT slides and my written script for our Worship on Sunday.

Well, long story short, all of a sudden, I lost all access to my Microsoft 365 programs. When I tried to access them, all I got was an error message.

This meant I lost ALL access to my files. I was pretty certain my files were fine, but there was no way I could access them ... no way I could print them. I felt panic setting in ... I didn't want you to arrive for Worship on Sunday morning and be told, we have no worship because of technical difficulties.

When I told Naomi what was going on, she had a wonderful response. She said, "You are demonstrating an example of unhealthy fear." And how right she was.

I eventually was able to uninstall and then reinstall the Microsoft software that I needed. It was then that I proceeded to relax as I finished my final edits, printed the materials, and we did indeed worship last Sunday.

As people of God, we live and walk by faith. We trust God even in the face of fear, and as we are learning through this series - we can play an active role in identifying fear and giving it back to God. This IS our DAILY responsibility.

I am reminded of the story in Numbers 13-14 where the twelve spies went to explore the promised land. They returned with a fear-filled report about the GIANTS who lived in

FORTIFIED cities throughout the land.

Caleb and Joshua were the only spies who trusted that God would deliver His people into the land as God had promised.

The rest of the spies and all the people rebelled against God and Moses, and decided it would be better to return to slavery in Egypt. In this instance, it cost God's people 40 additional years of wandering in the desert.

The people of God allowed fear to ROB them of the promise of God and steal their precious time. For most, it meant the rest of their lives. Most would NEVER see the promised land ... would never see God's promise fulfilled.

Obviously, the story I just shared is an intense one. In fact, it is one of the most PAINFUL stories in the history of Gods people being set free from slavery and entering the promised land.

Some of the main points of the story, however, are still applicable in our lives today. For example...

Is fear robbing you of the promises of God in your life?
Is fear stealing your precious time on earth?

Are you feeling paralyzed by the potential trouble that the future may or may not bring?

I could go on and on here as there are multitude ways fear affects and redirects our lives. At the conclusion of the first sermon in our series I said,

"It speaks to just how destructive unhealthy fear can be in our lives that we NEED power, love, and self-discipline to help us overcome it. We need the discipline to check ourselves throughout the day. We need discipline to form new habits to identify healthy fear from unhealthy fear, and we need abundant power and love in our responses."

And today, I want to add an important addendum to that statement. We only need to exercise that SPIRIT-FILLED self-discipline I just described, ONE day at a time.

The Praise Team is introducing a new song today called "Hold On, the Light Will Come". We will end our worship with this new song because it speaks so clearly to our theme for today.

The term "the light of the world" is a metaphor indicating revelation FROM God to ALL humanity. The Apostle John wrote in 1 John 1:7, "But if we walk in the light (if we walk in the revelation from God to all humanity), as He is in the light (as Jesus is in the revelation of God to all humanity), we have fellowship with one another ... and the blood of Jesus will purify us from all sin."

This song "Hold On, the Light Will Come" is truly a prayer for the Lord to come and call you from a life of fear and darkness to a life of peace and light.

The past 2 weeks I've given you a specific challenge. And for this coming week, I want to also give you a challenge.

Each day I want you to identify areas of unhealthy fear in your life. Then, I want you to place

that fear back in the hands of God through a gratitude-laced prayer.

As you continue to make this a habit, I believe you will begin to experience a divine peace in your life that does transcend human understanding. And more importantly, I believe you will begin to put a distance between yourself and fear, while also living more of the life God has for you.

Before we pray together, I want you to imagine for a moment how different the history of the Israelite people could have been, if they had practiced what we are practicing with regards to fear. What if the twelve spies returned from the promised land and led a community prayer that sounded something like this...

"Father in heaven, thank you for freeing us from slavery in Egypt. Thank you for providing for us these past 40 days in the desert and thank you for bringing us here to the very edge of the land you've promised. Lord we see giants living in the land. They have impenetrable cities and we're scared. It's hard to see how we might be successful in battle against enemies like them. But God, we know that you can do anything. You spoke to Moses from a burning bush, you parted the red sea, and you destroyed the armies of Pharaoh. We trust that you can do this as well. Lead us, calm our hearts, and deliver us into the promised land. Amen."

Similarly, how different would our lives look, if we were truly focused on today by lifting all our circumstances to God in SPIRIT-FILLED prayer?
And all God's people say ... AMEN.