

+ 2 Kings 6:15-17 + The Resurrection Life: Confident—No Longer Afraid +
+ 6th Sunday of Easter + 10 May 2015 +

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

“Don’t be afraid.” A mother comforts her crying child after he woke up screaming from a nightmare. “Don’t be afraid.” A father calms his frightened child who isn’t so sure about jumping into the water and his waiting arms. “Don’t be afraid.” A young man tells himself before he asks a young lady out on a date. “Don’t be afraid.” A young woman tells herself before walking into a job interview. “Don’t be afraid.” A husband encourages his wife as she works through a long night of labor pains. “Don’t be afraid.” An older man tells himself as he leaves work for the last time before retirement. “Don’t be afraid.” A pastor reassures a dying member beside her hospital bed.

Fear—every one of us knows it all too well. Fear has been a reality for every human being since Adam and Eve fell into sin. In fear, they hid from the Lord who loved them. So every descendant after them has had to deal with fear. Since that time, fear comes all too naturally to every single one of us, because every one of us fears something.

Maybe it’s heights or spiders or clowns. Maybe it’s flying or leaving home. Maybe it’s hospitals or losing a loved one. Maybe it’s running out of money or losing your job so you can’t pay the bills and put food on the table. Maybe it’s rejection or ridicule or harm, especially if it comes because of your Christian faith. Maybe it’s admitting the guilt of some sin you’ve committed. Maybe it’s getting older and losing control. Maybe it’s dealing with your past or facing the unknown future. Maybe it’s simply death.

If every one of us fears something, how do you handle it? Some can bury it better than others. Some have been able to limit their fears or at least how those fears impact their lives, but when you’re faced with what or whom you fear, how well do you handle it? It’s easy to say, “Don’t be afraid,” but do those words really take your fear away or are they just words?

You wonder what kind of fear coursed through the mind of the young servant of God’s prophet Elisha that one early morning when he woke up to find **“an army with horses and chariots who had surrounded”** them. You can imagine him hurriedly shaking the prophet awake. **“Oh, my lord, what shall we do?”** You can imagine the terror in his eyes from seeing the mighty army of Aram surrounding their little city of Dothan.

It had all started some time before when the king of Aram went to war with Israel. Israel was weak with poorly defended borders and the Arameans were flexing their muscle. At one point, the king of Aram told his officers, **“I will set up my camp in such and such a place.”** (2 Kings 6:8) Little did he realize, but the Lord had revealed that plan to Elisha, God’s prophet. Elisha faithfully informed the king of Israel to beware of that location, and what do you know! The king’s scouts found exactly what Elisha had told them. Israel avoided the Arameans and foiled their plan.

Well, this same pattern began to happen again and again until it got to such a point that the king of Aram confronted his officers, **“Will you not tell me which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?”** “One of you must be a traitor! How can Israel know what I have said only in the privacy of my home!” None of the officers were actually guilty, but they knew who was. **“None of us, my lord the king...but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom.”** So the king devised a plan to remove Elisha. Once he found out Elisha’s location, the king **“sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city.”** (2 Kings 6:11-14)

That’s what the young servant of Elisha discovered that morning 850 years before Christ’s birth. With such a deadly threat on every side, no one in that town was going to protect them. Surely an aging prophet and his young servant weren’t going to hold off a mighty army when it attacked. Terrified the young servant rushed to the bedside of the prophet and shook him awake. **“Oh, my lord, what shall we do??”**

Elisha’s answer was simple. **“Don’t be afraid...”** That we would expect, but not what he said next. **“Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”** Huh? You can understand why Elisha would want to reassure his young servant with **“Don’t be afraid,”** but he didn’t stop there. No, Elisha pointed out how the Lord of free and faithful grace was going to take away their fear and how he was going to deliver them even in the midst of insurmountable odds. Fear stood no chance against the true God.

While his young servant shook with fear, Elisha calmly prayed to the Lord of free and faithful grace. **“O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.”** That’s exactly what God in his grace did for the servant. He **“opened the**

servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

God allowed the young man to see the greater, mightier army of the Lord's angels protecting not just Elisha, but that young man too. Surely they had no need to fear, no need to have troubled hearts even when the sizable human army charged to take Elisha. At that moment, Elisha prayed once more and the Lord struck the Arameans blind. With the Lord's help, Elisha led the blinded Aramean army into captivity before sending them home safely. Fear stood no chance.

So how do you handle fear? Do you try to bury it or mask it? Do you try to ignore it or cover it up with distractions? Do you try to limit it by not putting yourself into situations that make you afraid? Do you swing the other direction and charge at every situation that might make you fearful? Do you tell yourself or others, "Don't be afraid. It's not that big of a deal"? Does any of that actually take your fear away or are you simply trying to sub-consciously fool yourself into thinking that you're fearless?

Because sin is a reality in every one of our lives, fear is also a reality in every one of our lives. Generally we've handled that fear pretty poorly. We work hard to eliminate or limit fear in our lives, but what results? Like the mythological hydra that grew two new heads every time one was cut off, that's what Satan, your sinful nature, and the sinful world around you do with that inbred fear inside of you. You fear hospitals, but by trying to avoid them, you develop a fear of doctors and medical tests. You fear running out of money, but by devoting your life to eliminating that fear, you develop a fear for the wealth you have earned or the retirement that you have planned. You fear rejection for your Christian faith, but in seeking to avoid that, you develop a fear about being identified as a Christian. You see the same thing happen with your fear of losing control or your fear of the unknown future or your fear of death. You and I don't stand a chance against fear on our own.

Satan, your sinful nature, and the sinful world stand arrayed against you with all of the terrifying demons and movements and "-isms" in our world. You shouldn't be surprised if that thought alone fills you with a certain amount of fear. Like the servant we cry out, ***"Oh, my Lord, what shall we do?"*** And God's response? ***"Don't be afraid... Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."*** Jesus tell us, ***"Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."*** (John 14:27) "Don't worry. Fear doesn't stand a chance."

Jesus points out how he—the Lord of free and faithful grace—has already acted to take away our fears, how he has delivered and will deliver us even against what seems like insurmountable odds. He does that by taking us to his Word, where he opens our eyes of faith to see everything.

The Lord of grace provides angels—***"ministering spirits"***—to serve and protect believers (Hebrews 1:14), ***"to guard you in all your ways"*** ((Psalm 91:11) as he used them to protect Elisha and his servant. Martin Luther once wrote, ***"Where there are twenty devils, there are a hundred angels, and if that were not so, we should long since have perished. We are on the battle front whenever we teach the Word, whenever we preach and glorify Christ, and then live, as far as possible, according to the Gospel and the Word of God."*** (Luther's Works—American Edition 12:227)

The Lord of grace also provides for all your needs. How often doesn't our Lord urge us not to worry about the things of this life? Why? If he can clothe the flowers of the field with splendor and pay attention even to the brief lives of sparrows, surely he will provide for us! The Lord of grace guides all things—even those times that fill you with fear—for your eternal good or the eternal good of others around you or after you. Fear stands no chance against those who are beloved by God himself, because the Lord removes our fear.

Nowhere is that clearer than in the person of our Savior Jesus Christ. See how Jesus removes your fear in what he has done for you. Look to the manger and see there God in human flesh, a baby come to face what has brought you and everyone else fear since Adam and Eve. Look to the dusty roads and crowded homes of Palestine and see there a Savior who overcomes all the fearful consequences and effects of sin in this sinful world. Look to the cross and see there God's Servant suffering for us the hell that we all deserve and we all fear, so we need not be afraid anymore. Look to the empty tomb and see there a living Redeemer who conquers that most terrifying enemy of all—Death. Look to the heavens and see there a King of kings who rules and controls all things for the good of...us! Fear stands no chance against that Savior Jesus, who loves us and lives for us.

So what do you get when you no longer need to be afraid? Confidence that the One who is with you is greater than those who are with them. Peace and joy even in the midst of what seems like insurmountable odds. Hope in the reality that blessed and eternal deliverance is coming soon, even as we enjoy the salvation that is ours through our Savior Jesus. Life that is not like life in this world marred and marked by fear, but a life free of fear

because we have Jesus and he is greater than fear. My friends, don't be afraid because **Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!** Alleluia! Amen.