

Today we begin a special sermon series, focusing our thoughts on **FEARLESS LIVING!** Today, many people are living in fear . . . fear of war, fear of terrorism, fear of the economy, fear of aging, fear of hunger, fear of environmental destruction, fear of the future. But as Christians, our faith tells us, that when we name our fears and face our fears, we have God’s eternal promise of support and love. In fact, the very last verse from the Gospel of Matthew, gives us the promise of that eternal presence and grace from the lips of Jesus, “*Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.*” (*Matthew 28:20*)

And because of that presence, Jesus dares us to live a **FEARLESS LIFE**, a life that loves beyond reason, trusts beyond expectation, hopes beyond the present, and gives beyond what is practical. Jesus dares us to live a **FEARLESS LIFE** that is lived . . . fully open to the possibilities of the Kingdom of God in our midst, in the real world in which we live!

Of course, real life is everywhere. We see it in ourselves, in our families, at our work, with our neighbors, with our money, and, yes, in our church.

But here is the truth . . . what each and every one of us does, matters to others and it matters to God. What we do, has the power to enrich life or deprive life of its full meaning. What we do, has the power to bring us closer to God or push us farther away from God.

So, in this series, each week, we will focus on one part of living a **FEARLESS LIFE**. Each week there will be a challenge to you, to connect your faith to your life. In this series, we will be addressing issues and questions like this:

- What are your fears?
- Are there others who might share those fears?
- What are your fears keeping you from becoming?
- What would you attempt to do if you knew you could not fail?

On the television program, *Saturday Night Live*, there used to be a segment known as DEEP THOUGHTS BY JACK HANDEY. They were the kinds of things that made sense on a certain level, but also were kind of strange and actually humorous, on another level. One of the most interesting ones I remember was this . . . and it had to do with fear: “*What am I afraid of? I’ll tell you: a feather. That’s right, a feather. How could anyone be afraid of a feather, you say. That’s an honest question, and I’ll try to give it an honest answer. First of all, did I say it was a poison feather?*”

Some fears are real. Some fears are imaginary. Some fears are incapacitating. Some fears are so strong they destroy our spirit. Well known author, Rhonda Britten, has written a book with the title, *Fearless Living*. It has been on the bestseller lists and actually has a website as well as a Fearless Living Institute. Her focus is always to take control of your life . . . to do the things that you can actually do . . . to trust in the power that is within yourself . . . and to venture into life without fear.

As Christians, our perspective for **FEARLESS LIVING** carries a slightly different focus. Our perspective begins with God's love and grace. It is God's grace that makes **FEARLESS LIVING** possible!

Here is a simple example: For a moment, just pretend with me that this is the first day of a class you *have* to pass in order to get your degree. The class is very tough. The instructor walks in and this professor is known all over school for challenging students to do their absolute best. He looks at the class directly and says, "*In my class, everyone in will receive an A+. Now let's get to work.*"

That is what God's grace looks like and feels like. God has given us the free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus. The question now becomes:

- What are you going to do about that?
- What will you dare to do, in order to become the person God intends you to be?

Every day is an adventure of choice and action. What we do and say and think, makes the world around us what it is. God has given us the freedom to make the world better, or to make it worse; to help or hurt; to bring God's word and God's kingdom to others, or to leave things alone.

**FEARLESS LIVING** dares us to commit our lives to God. It dares to discover our call in the midst of our present life. It dares to feel joy or thankfulness, sorrow or need for others as well as for ourselves. It dares to reconcile with an enemy. It dares to chase a dream, to live with intention.

In the lesson from I Timothy chapter 6, Paul urges his friend and fellow disciple, in vs. 11 to: "*pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.*" He urges Timothy in vs. 12 to "*fight the good fight of the faith and to take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called.*"

Those qualities listed, are all qualities of life that represent the positive values of faith. They are qualities of life that we should all aspire to. But what keeps us from embracing them! Obviously it is our FEARS! What if we fail? Will we have enough strength and courage inside of ourselves to accomplish what we need to accomplish? Will we alienate people on the way? Will others think less of us? Will those qualities make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others?

Emily Dickinson in her poem *Time and Eternity* wrote these words:

*Afraid? Of whom am I afraid?  
Not death; for who is he?  
The porter of my father's lodge  
As much abasheth me.*

*That comprehendeth me  
In one or more existences  
At Deity's decree.*

*Of resurrection? Is the east  
Afraid to trust the morn  
With her fastidious forehead?  
As soon impeach my crown.*

In 1976, Laurie Klein was a 24 year-old wife and mother struggling to keep her family afloat. Her husband, Bill, was a full-time student at Central Oregon Community College, and Laurie often felt totally isolated socially and spiritually.

It was a dark time in her life. They had no extra money, no friends nearby, no church home, and my husband was busy all of the time with his studies. They lived on a highway in a mobile home, so she couldn't even put the baby in a stroller and go for a walk. Laurie was lonely. She felt isolated and totally alone.

In the early mornings, Laurie would pull out her Bible and guitar and begin praying and singing songs. One morning, she started strumming on the guitar and the first two lines of a song that would later become one of the most popular contemporary praise songs, "*I Love You, Lord*," came out of her mouth with virtually no effort.

*I love You Lord  
and I lift my voice  
To worship You  
O my soul, rejoice!*

*Take joy, my King  
in what you hear  
May it be a sweet, sweet sound  
in Your ear.*

Weeks later, a friend of the Laurie and Bill visited them. He knew they were going through tough times and he wanted to encourage them. During the conversation Bill insisted that Laurie sing her new song for him. Their friend liked "*I Love You, Lord*" so much that he took it to a national church convention in California and sang it for the thousands of church leaders gathered there. It became the theme song for the convention.

As a result, it went home with pastors from all over the world, and within a year Laurie was getting phone calls from people who wanted more information about the song. But its greatest exposure was in the worship book, *Maranatha! Music's Praise 4 in 1980*. Since then, Bill Klein has lost count but estimates the song has been released on nearly 100 recordings. "*It changed everything for me*," said Laurie, and 30 years later, it's still touching lives. In the times of deepest need, FEARLESS LIVING, through God's grace, enables us to see things differently and embrace the fullness of life.

Yesterday as I was browsing through some websites, I found this remarkable quotation from an unknown source. It said: "*The most important thing is to be able at any moment to sacrifice what we are . . . for what we can become!*"

It also reminded me of another famous quotation by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who said, “*You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. To deal with fear, you must do the thing which you think you cannot do.*”

Listen to the words of a poem written by **Deviyana Misquitta**, a young poet whose work is published just last year, 2007. It is called “*Alive With Life.*”

Tell me, are you alive today?  
 Alive with the joy of life?  
 With a beat in your heart?  
 With a song in your soul?  
 Along this lonely road of conflict and strife,  
 Are you still heading towards your goal?

Does your life give you  
 Everything you want out of it?  
 Do you try hard enough though?  
 Do you really do your bit?

Sometimes we falter,  
 Sometimes we fall,  
 Sometimes we just want to give up  
 When that is not really an option at all.

The secret of life is maybe this:  
 To find the silver lining  
 And even in the dark moonless night  
 To find the stars shining.

To live every day as it comes,  
 To welcome everything it has brought,  
 When we don't have what we need  
 We should face life with what we have got.

Have faith in tomorrow  
 When today hasn't been so great.  
 Do everything you possibly can;  
 Mold your destiny, conquer your fate

Now, do you feel alive today?  
 Your choice will decide this for you.  
 Pain, loneliness, despair might not go away  
 But your faith, hope, love will surely see you through!

Take a moment right now to look at your hands. Hold them up in front of you and look at them carefully. Look how the veins are carrying life-giving blood through your hands into your fingers. Look at the scars and hollows, the ridges and contours of your hands. Does your skin feel warm or cool . . . dry or soft?

How have your hands changed over time? Now close your eyes and re-examine your hands by touch alone. What do you notice this time that's different? Can you locate a pulse? What do your hands communicate about the way you live?

What do you think God's hand in your hand feels like? When you imagine God's hand in your hand, does it give you strength and confidence? Join each other's hands for a moment. Feel the touch of a brother or sister near you. Let us pray together . . .

Gracious God, you have given us hands to do your work, hands to hold, hands to use, hands to shape, hands to touch. Some of our hands have lost their strength. Some of our hands have become worn and crippled, but they are still the hands you have given to us. May they this day, be signs of FEARLESS LIVING . . . May they be hands ready to grasp your hand and be led on the way to FEARLESS LIVING and LIFE ETERNAL!

Kate Harper lives in Scotland. She tells her story about fear: *“Last weekend the family convinced me to go with them to a Mountain Biking Centre where I rented a bike and for the first time faced my fear of being out of control.*

*I am a competent cyclist on the flat, but faced with the kind of trails that exist at the centre, I could feel my insides curling up into a knot. I asked myself: How do I face my fear? What do I need to do to deal with that terror? How can I acknowledge that this is a scary situation and still take action in spite of it?*

*My goal was to get from the top of the trail to the bottom without killing myself! How was I going to do that? I suppose I could have walked down, but that wasn't the point of being at the Mountain Biking Centre. The only person I would be letting down if I did that was myself. Check my brakes, take a deep breath and go for it!*

*Facing the things we are frightened of, can often reduce their impact. This was a day of fun for me and the family. I knew deep down that I'd enjoy it, and I also needed to prove something to myself as well. It was time for me to face something I'd been putting off for a while. No one had nagged me, or made rude comments about me not joining the family each week. I could have made excuses and not gone - but I wanted to!*

FEARLESS LIVING means taking those things that we are afraid of, and giving them over to God, trusting in God's eternal presence and support, no matter what. FEARLESS LIVING for ourselves always begins with God. Amen.