

11.05.23 – Pentecost 23

“No Fear!”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Psalm 56 (NIV)

For the director of music. To the tune of “A Dove on Distant Oaks.” Of David. A miktam. When the Philistines had seized him in Gath.

- ¹ Be merciful to me, my God,
for my enemies are in hot pursuit;
all day long they press their attack.
- ² My adversaries pursue me all day long;
in their pride many are attacking me.
- ³ When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.
- ⁴ In God, whose word I praise—
in God I trust and am not afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?
- ⁵ All day long they twist my words;
all their schemes are for my ruin.
- ⁶ They conspire, they lurk,
they watch my steps,
hoping to take my life.
- ⁷ Because of their wickedness do not let them escape;
in your anger, God, bring the nations down.
- ⁸ Record my misery;
list my tears on your scroll—
are they not in your record?
- ⁹ Then my enemies will turn back
when I call for help.
By this I will know that God is for me.
- ¹⁰ In God, whose word I praise,
in the Lord, whose word I praise—
- ¹¹ in God I trust and am not afraid.
What can man do to me?
- ¹² I am under vows to you, my God;
I will present my thank offerings to you.
- ¹³ For you have delivered me from death
and my feet from stumbling,
that I may walk before God
in the light of life.

Leader: These Confident Words Are Because of God! All: Thanks be to God!

2 Timothy 1:6-14 (NLT)

- ⁶ This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. ⁷ For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

⁸ So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don't be ashamed of me, either even though I'm in prison for him. With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the Good News. ⁹ For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus. ¹⁰ And now he has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of Christ Jesus, our Savior. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News. ¹¹ And God chose me to be a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of this Good News.

¹² That is why I am suffering here in prison. But I am not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return.

¹³ Hold on to the pattern of wholesome teaching you learned from me—a pattern shaped by the faith and love that you have in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you.

Leader: These Words of the Apostle Paul Are from God. All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Protector God, we worship and adore you, yet sometimes fear our circumstances or the world's pressures. We thank you for the psalmist who was so honest about his fear yet reassured by your word and divine promise. Please speak to us with a message to calm our anxiety and trust in you. Help us to understand what it means to be fully surrendered to your will, even in times of uncertainty. Fill us with divine courage to cope with the stresses of life, knowing that you strengthen our resolve to love and to share your grace with others. May we hear your Words and your voice as you speak through this servant. Amen.

Today's topic of "No Fear!" came not from the timeliness of Halloween, although each year it seems to get more gruesome and frightening in terms of costumes and makeup. "No Fear" has been on my mind for the last couple of months. Friends came by in May, helping to bolster my courage for the heart procedures, but in reality, I wasn't afraid. I didn't have time to build up any fear as I asked pertinent questions and made quick decisions; plus, I had educated, experienced advisors and was in gifted, professional surgical hands. Don't get me wrong, I am not immune to fear; I just felt God's peace at every step of my healing

journey. Pastors are human and have fears too, sometimes over global situations, or when supporting a congregant or loved one's despair. Generally, because of our calling to ministry, even if fear sneaks into our minds, the Holy Spirit and God's grace equip us with a strong enough faith to defeat the enemy's torment. I think that's what happened to David and Timothy as we'll learn soon.

First, let's define fear. Wikipedia's definition is:

Fear is an intensely unpleasant emotion in response to perceiving or recognizing a danger or threat. [It] causes physiological changes that may produce behavioral reactions such as . . . an aggressive response or fleeing the threat. Fear in human beings may occur in response to a certain stimulus occurring in the present [or a past trigger], or in anticipation . . . of a future threat perceived as a risk . . . The fear response arises from the perception of danger leading to confrontation with or escape from . . . the threat (known as fight-or-flight response), which in extreme cases of fear (horror and terror) can be a freeze response.

I am sure that you can recall a few things that caused instant fear in your past; it may be a personal issue that brought about fear, or a bigger crisis or catastrophe like a hurricane, snowstorm, or 9/11. If we were Jewish, right now we would fear for our safety because of the protests here in DC or on college campuses. Some fears are re-lived (like PTSD) just by watching the horrific videos of the war in the daily news. New babies bring about fears for new parents: will I be a good mom or dad? How can I care for this little one? Is he or she healthy? How do we manage our finances for college? Anxiety and dread are real emotions that need God's mercy, grace, and intervention for healing and comfort. They can lead to depression or other physical ailments; those feelings can also lead to inaction and procrastination or poor decision-making.

So, what do the psalmist and apostle suggest? A stronger relationship with God and belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let's explore. Psalm 56 was probably written by David when he fled Saul's revenge and sought protection among the Philistines (1 Sam 21:10, Ps 34). Enemies awaited him, but he trusted that God would protect him by destroying those who wanted to slander his name, steal his property, or kill him. He finally realized that no mortal man could hurt him if he trusted in God and a divine plan for his life. God even knew when he wept, counting and keeping his tears in a bottle, figuratively speaking. In Roman and Victorian tradition, it was customary for a lady to keep a decorative tear bottle or "tear catcher" to measure her weeping. Then they were sometimes buried with a person at death, demonstrating appropriate mourning. This illustration tells of a divine intimacy with a **God of love**.

David also writes that God will **slay** his enemies and by that action, he will know that "God is with me." This reassurance reminds me of the Twenty-third Psalm, "4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will **fear no evil: for thou art with me**; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Like us, David was afraid at first, but then remembered how God had never abandoned him; he trusted him based on both faith and life's testimony. He asks, God, can you catch my stumbling feet if I fall? If so, I will walk in your light and protection forever with NO FEAR! Although the Hebrew text was hard to translate because of some damage in transmission, what we know of this psalm is still relevant today. The writer was under attack, much like the students at the concert in Israel, ambushed. They acted with so much courage, trying to protect one another, pleading for their lives, or extra minutes to say goodbye to their

parents on their phones. Some even died praising God and offering forgiveness to their slayers. Bold faith.

In our second passage, the apostle Paul wrote from a Roman dungeon. He urged the young missionary, preacher, and teacher, Timothy, to fan into flame his God given gift for ministry. Timothy was intimidated by the Judaizer opposition to Paul; Paul reminds him of his ordination and calling, how they laid hands upon him in the Holy Spirit's power, love, strength, self-discipline, and direction. Courage was **needed** so others could witness God in action through bold, holy living and sound teaching. We and Timothy were appointed to serve as confident messengers and teachers of Christ's Gospel. Paul trusted Timothy as Christ trusted Paul; and likewise, Timothy must trust the Lord with the help of the Holy Spirit to do the work he was called to do.

The Christian life does require boldness and courage, a power we may not have, but one that does come through the Holy Spirit. As Timothy is reminded, so I remind **you** to rekindle your faith as you would rekindle a shrinking fire. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear (1 Jn 4:18)." One thing this congregation has at its core is **love**. You may not feel called to leadership within the church, but this church and you specifically are called to leadership within your families, your neighborhood, this community and in our world. Our Vision and Mission Statements are holy callings, to be faced without fear, but with boldness, action, wisdom, and faith. Will you come to a Brown Bag Lunch on Saturday, November 18th at noon to explore with me the needs of our city and county? Will you dare to experiment with relationships and mission in more pop-up activities? Or are we as a church stuck in the rut of

weekly worship and fellowship? We celebrate communion the first Sunday of each month to fortify ourselves, remembering Christ's sacrifice on the cross. In these anxious times, no matter our age or prior ministries efforts, let us **reach out** to those who may be afraid, because they know Him not. Help us, Lord, to live out the courageous calling to share the Gospel through worship, faith, and actionable service. ***Have no fear!*** Remember last week's message from God to Moses to Joshua as he entered the unknown promised land?

⁶ Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you The Lord himself goes **before you and will be with you**; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

Let us carry on the work of our faith and ministry, being divinely equipped to do the work physically, mentally, emotionally, and financially, confident in the Holy Spirit's guidance, power, and direction. Amen? Amen! ||

Please pray with me. Lord and Savior, we thank you for calling us to do your work. Help us to be courageous servants to others. Help us to share your love with those who need your grace and mercy. May we study more deeply the Scriptures, praying and listening for your direction, encouraging one another and those we encounter daily in these anxious times. Be present with us now and bless these elements as we share communion in memory of your Son Jesus, in whose name we pray, **Amen.**