

Living by Faith (not Fear)

John 14, Luke 7

This has been a crazy last couple of weeks, hasn't it? Until the end of the week we were planning on taking precautions and having corporate worship this morning. But things developed such that yesterday morning we decided to suspend all gatherings here at the church building at least until Sunday March 29th (two weeks from today). The offices will be open during the week, but we aren't opening the church for meetings and Rooted and groups.

We have never done this before. This global pandemic is unlike anything we've faced in my time at Faith. The reason we are suspending our gatherings ISN'T because we're in panic mode or because we're paralyzed by fear. We're not meeting together as a church because we want to be good neighbors and we want to love for our community well. We believe that the current pandemic is a serious thing; we don't want to do anything that might potentially spread this virus in our community.

Given the uncertainty of these days, I'm going to talk this morning about living by faith, not fear. Humanly speaking, there are lots of legitimate concerns due to this global pandemic:

- * Health-wise. You or people you know may be at risk due to age or immune deficiencies or respiratory issues. In some places (like Italy) the health system is overwhelmed at the sheer number of people needing care.
- * Financially. Some of you may be missing paychecks because you can't work when schools/businesses aren't open. Some of you are small business owners whose income is suffering because people aren't "out and about." If you're retired, the drop in the stock market might jeopardize your ability to pay the bills. There are financial concerns these days.
- * With kids out of school, you might be trying to figure out what you're going to do about childcare while you're at work. In some families, the children eat two meals a day at school; needing to buy extra groceries is a big deal for some people.
- * High school students might be experiencing the loss of spring sports, the complications that missing school creates for taking placement tests and applying to colleges.
- * College/Grad students. You may be wondering how you're going to complete the semester or complete your degree.

On many levels, this pandemic raises legitimate concerns.

This morning I want you to know that if you are troubled by any of these things (or by other things), there is great encouragement in Scripture. Think about Jesus' disciples the night before the crucifixion. Jesus had made a series of troubling statements. He had predicted that one of them (namely Judas) would betray Him, that Peter would deny Him, and that He would be going somewhere that they could not follow. He had even made some incomprehensible statements about being crucified.

They had left careers and families to follow Jesus, and now He says he's leaving them. Some of you know what it's like to move across the country (or the world!) for a person or a job and then the thought crosses your mind, "I've made the biggest mistake of my life." That's what the disciples were thinking.

Consequently, they were "troubled in heart." Even though Jesus was the One facing crucifixion, **He** was concerned about **their** troubled hearts. In John 14 Jesus tells the disciples what would comfort their troubled hearts. In John 14:1 He says this:

1 "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.

Even though there are times that we will be "troubled in Spirit" (just as Jesus was - see 13:21 and 12:27), we don't have to live our lives in a state of perpetual troubledness. Jesus isn't advocating that we pretend that everything's fine when it's not. He's saying that there is a type of wholeness and confident well-being that transcends troubling circumstances. Even though there were times when Jesus was troubled (see also 11:33), the tenor of his life was joyful confidence.

Jesus' command, "Do not let your heart be troubled" presupposes that His disciples have a degree of influence over the condition of their hearts. They aren't completely at the mercy of their circumstances. They could engage their wills and not let their hearts be troubled.

The antidote to a troubled heart is faith: "believe in God, believe also in Me." The command, "Believe in God," wouldn't have been surprising at all; all Jews in the first century would agree that you should put your trust in God. But to command, "believe also in Me," was extraordinary. He was saying that He was to be the object of their faith just as God the Father is. This is yet another of Jesus' implicit claims to be God.

Read the rest of John 14 sometime; you will see several specific reasons why they shouldn't let their hearts be troubled:

- * He was preparing a place for them; they would soon be with Him in the presence of the Father.
- * Until that day, Jesus and the Father would dwell within them through the promised Holy Spirit. He says, "I will not leave you as orphans."
- * Jesus **doesn't** tell them not to be troubled because everything is going to work out just fine in this life. To the contrary, He promised them that **they** would be treated the same way **He** was treated! Still he commands, "Do not let your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me."

For these same reasons, I would say to you in the midst of this worldwide pandemic: Do not let your heart be troubled. Believe in God and also in Jesus through the power of the indwelling Spirit. Have confidence that He will take care of you no matter what happens. The One who formed you in your mother's womb, the One who called you to Himself, the One who has promised "I will never desert you nor forsake you" will take care of you

throughout this life and into the next. You don't need to see the future; you mainly need to know that God is faithful to take care of you.

As a motivation to "Believe in God and also in Jesus," I want us to consider a passage of Scripture that assures us that Jesus notices our faith. Understanding and receiving what this passage says can be a powerful encouragement to us as we trust God over the next few weeks/months (or however long this pandemic is with us). [One person I read said that we shouldn't think of this as preparing for a blizzard; it's more like preparing for a long winter. . . and we're living in Hawaii. . . Only God knows.]

Jesus notices our faith. (Luke 7:1-10)

We'll begin in Luke 7:1-10. Notice how Luke sets up the context.

7:1 When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum.

The "discourse" Luke mentions is the Sermon on the Mount recorded in the previous chapter. Jesus went to Capernaum where a certain centurion lived. A centurion was an officer in the Roman army who commanded 100 men. We learn a lot about this centurion right off the bat.

2 And a centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die. 3 When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave.

The centurion cared about his slave and didn't want him to die. Apparently the centurion had heard that Jesus was a man who could heal people. As you might imagine, reports about Jesus' ability to heal spread rapidly. As we'll see later in this passage, whatever this centurion heard about Jesus stimulated great faith. He was confident that Jesus had the power to heal his servant whom he cared so much about. Instead of approaching Jesus directly, he sent "some Jewish elders" – the leaders in the Jewish community – to ask Jesus to come. Apparently he thought that since Jesus was Jewish, they would be more influential in getting him to come heal the servant. The Jewish elders appealed to Jesus in an interesting way:

4 When they came to Jesus, they earnestly implored Him, saying, "He is worthy for You to grant this to him; 5 for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue."

They emphasized the centurion's worthiness, that he "deserved" (NIV) to have this request granted. The reason given was his love for their nation and the fact that he had built their synagogue. Not all Romans had this type of generosity toward the Jews. We aren't really told Jesus' response to this report that the centurion was deserving. It will be his faith, not his worthiness, that Jesus will ultimately commend. Interestingly, as Jesus makes His way to the centurion's house, the centurion sent friends to Jesus with a message about his unworthiness.

6 Now Jesus started on His way with them; and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof; 7 for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed.

This doesn't seem to be the type of false humility that you sometimes encounter. Apparently he really saw himself as unworthy in comparison to Jesus. The last line of verse 7, however, expressed great faith: "but just say the word, and my servant will be healed." He actually believed that Jesus had the power to heal his servant from a distance with a "word" from His mouth. [Look at 2 Kings 5 for a contrasting view.]

In verse 8 the centurion makes an analogy between his own authority and that of Jesus.

8 "For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it."

In other words, the centurion knew firsthand what authority was. He was under authority: he knew how his superiors could control him with a word. And he had authority over others: he knew how he could control others with his words. He was saying to Jesus, "You have authority over disease/illness. Just say the word and You can control my servant's health." Jesus' response to the centurion is rather amazing:

9 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith."

It's pretty impressive when Jesus "marvels" at you. Jesus had encountered a person who "got it" – who understood the type of authority and power that He had. He was not limited by the severity of the disease or by distance. Jesus comment to the crowd following Him was that "not even in Israel have I found such faith." This is ironic because the Jews were the most likely to have faith because they had the Hebrew Scriptures which spoke of Him and His power. Sadly, relatively few of them believed. By contrast, Jesus noticed in the centurion "great faith" – great confidence in His power and authority.

10 When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

Jesus responded to the faith of the centurion and healed his slave.

Just as Jesus noticed (past tense) great faith in the centurion, Jesus notices (present tense) great faith in us! He notices when we have confidence in His ability. He may even **marvel at us** when we understand that He is not perplexed or frustrated by the difficulty

of our circumstances and that He has authority over every single issue we face. That is an amazing prospect.

I would like to challenge all of us to actively trust Jesus during the duration of this pandemic - whether it's a blizzard or a long winter. Would you join together with me, our elders, your life group members, your family members and actively trust Jesus to take care of you during these days/weeks/months/years?

I'm not talking about going into some super spiritual mode that's different than the life we pursue week-in and week-out. I'm talking about living by faith in the specific context of this pandemic - confident that God/Jesus/Holy Spirit will take care of us.

I'd like to give three ways we can live by faith so that Jesus might "marvel":

First, ***treasure up specific Scriptures in your heart***. Spend time mulling over Scriptures that will fuel your faith. For example, meditate on Psalm 46 daily for a week:

¹ God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
² Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*
⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
⁵ God is in the midst of her;
she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.
⁶ The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
⁷ The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*
⁸ Come, behold the works of the Lord,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.
⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.
¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!"
¹¹ The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah (ESV)*

Other Scriptures that will fuel your faith: Psalm 23, Psalm 91, Isaiah 40, Romans 8.

Second, **Pray**. Actually pray. Like the centurion, make requests of Jesus/God in faith. Faith is most often expressed in prayer. Most of us say we believe in prayer. This pandemic is an opportunity for us to practice pouring our our petitions to God.

Esau McCaulley, an Anglican Priest, shared a great idea: *"I've tried to make it my practice to pray for those affected by COVID-19 and against its spread whenever I wash my hands. It's been one way to combine faith and action."* This is a discipline Sam has adopted. And as of yesterday evening, I have adopted. If you wash your hands often, this is a simple reminder/opportunity to pray. We can pray for:

- * Decision-makers who affect large numbers of people
- * A vaccine and effective treatments
- * Healthcare workers who are caring for infected people
- * Protection from the virus
- * Financial issues of people in your world
- * The supply chain, etc.

Third, **Let your faith produce works**. A couple of weeks ago we saw in James 2 that "faith without works is dead." Genuine faith is demonstrated by good works - especially toward the most vulnerable and the most helpless in our community. Maybe you've seen this referenced in the context of coronavirus:

Let us have the attitude of the early church toward the sick and suffering even at personal cost. In the year 260 AD, Bishop Dionysius of Corinth praised the efforts of Christians for victims of a plague, many of whom died while caring for others: *"Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves, and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains."*

Praise God for the medical advances since the 3rd century! Not many of us will likely have to take the risks that they did in 260 AD. But their lives are a powerful example of the compassion Jesus taught about in the parable of the Good Samaritan and the parable of the Sheep and the Goats.

As you walk by faith these days, our encouragement is to keep your eyes open and to look for ways that you can express your faith through good works of compassion.

You might begin by **making a list of people** you know in your family, in the church, in your workplace, in your neighborhood who might be struggling due to the coronavirus.

- * You may buy groceries for a neighbor who can't really get out and shop in public places.

- * You may know someone in the church who's not really connected to others through a life group or ministry team. You might shoot them a text or a call to see how they're doing.
- * You are the church; you are on the frontlines; don't assume somebody else will meet the needs around you. Let your faith produce compassion that meets the tangible needs of people around you.

Let us know if you need help. If you need help serving someone else because the needs are greater than your capacity. . . or if **you** need help financially or practically. . . please let us know. You can email help@faithmanhattan.org and let us know that you **have** a need or that you want help **meeting** a need. Early this week we will be making available through the eBlast a form you can use to ask for help and to volunteer to help as needed.

Let not your heart be troubled. Believe God, believe also in Jesus.