

"Fear-proof your life" A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
September 1, 2019, Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
Hebrews 13:1-8,15-16

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Are there things you fear? Is it running out of money in your retirement? Is it being confronted by a homeless person or a person with a different skin color than yours? Are you afraid of dying and what will happen to those you leave behind? Are you afraid that you'll no longer be able to drive? Are you fearing the next family gathering because you don't want to listen to the political arguments? Are you afraid of the future for our country for your grandchildren and great grandchildren who will be living in that future?

All of us fear. And fear can be good. Fear can cause you to be cautious. Fear can keep us out of trouble. As a teen, I didn't do certain things because I was motivated by fear. What if my parents found out? Boy, would I be in big trouble!

And fear can be bad. Fear can keep us from growing in relationships or experiences. One simple example. You hear about a new restaurant, but when you look up the address you realize it's in what you consider an unsafe part of town. So, you don't go, only to find out from several more of your friends how great the food is and that the neighborhood is quite safe.

Fear can also keep us from experiencing new and enriching relationships. We may hesitate to talk to a person we don't know and miss a great opportunity to meet someone who could broaden our perspective on life. As our scripture says today: **Do not neglect to show hospitality to stranger, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.** Yes, fear could keep you and me from entertaining angels.

In these verses, the author of Hebrews tells us how to deal with fear. We are given a list of things to do beginning with mutual love and ending with keeping your lives free from the love of money. When you go home today, take a moment to reread these verses. If we do these things then the author writes: **The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?** The author of Hebrews is telling us "with God there is no need to fear."

As I mentioned, Hebrews provides us with a list of things to do so we will not be afraid. But, today, let's take a look at a different list, a lighthearted list, of how each of us can cast out fear by taking care of ourselves, enabling us to be more open to loving others. As First John 4:18 says, **Perfect love casts out fear.**

What follows is a list of 10 simple things you can do to live faithfully, not fearfully. Here are 10 small things you can incorporate into your normal routine that can help your faith create a future that outstrips your fears. A future of love, not fear. This list is a takeoff on David Letterman's lists he used to do on his show. (source: www.Homiletics.com, accessed 8/28)

Number 10. Be hospitable to the "strange" and the "stranger" in your life. Jesus talks about being hospitable to the stranger in the verses from Luke read today. But in #10, I'm not talking only about welcoming strangers. Break your daily routine in some small way and welcome new and different experiences. Try some new food each week. Take a new route to work or to the doctor's office or the grocery store. Read a new book of the Bible each week. Read each week from a book of the Bible that is unfamiliar to you. (What's the difference between Zechariah and Zephaniah, anyway?)

Being a bit more adventuresome just may open you up to new experiences and free you to step out when God calls.

Number 9. Take off your shoes the first chance you get. Remember what God told Moses? "Take off your shoes," God instructed Moses. "The place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5).

Walk barefoot. This is almost a universal statement from holy people. It's factually based. A study reported a few years ago in USA Today revealed that those individuals who habitually kick off their shoes under the dining table or their desk (pause) or their pew tend to live three years longer than the average American. If you feel comfortable doing so, take off your shoes right now!

In the Benedictine Monastic Order, the monks take off their shoes constantly -- for meals, for prayer, for conversation, for reading -- i.e., whenever shoes are not an absolute necessity, they go barefooted.

Why? Bare feet are aware feet: aware of the earth, aware of holiness, aware of life.

Feet that are bound for too long begin to stink. Souls that are bound up and cooped up for too long begin to stink as well. Let some fresh air into your soul. Go barefoot. Who knows, you may meet a new friend – another barefoot one.

Number 8. Meditate for 15 minutes every day. According to the American Institute on Stress, 75 to 90 percent of all visits to primary-care physicians are for stress-related complaints.

Many people are intimidated just hearing the word meditate. Don't make it difficult. Lie back wherever you are, close your eyes, and listen to music or to the sound of your breath. Just take time to stop, take time to do nothing. Everyone's world is too hectic today. Stopping allows you to hear God speaking to you.

When you're more relaxed, you are less fearful of new experiences, more open to God's love for you and for sharing that love with others.

Number 7. Do one "wild" thing a day. The "wild" thing doesn't have to be that wild. Go for a short walk in the sun without wearing sunscreen. Leave town without making a reservation. Make a purchase without reading Consumer Reports first.

Or if "wildness" is too "wild" for your taste, take a break and do something "silly." When it finally rains this fall, go walk in the rain without a raincoat and splash in the water puddles. I'm sure you can think of something silly to do!

Number 6. Say "No" (pause) sometimes. Susan, after confessing to her friend that she felt burned-out, said she had just volunteered to take on more duties. Susan's friend Leah said to her, "Susan, I have a mantra for you." And in a low voice she chanted, "Nooooooooooooo."

"Omm?" Susan said.

"No! Noooooooooooo," Leah chanted again.

Then the two of them began chanting it together in unison: "Noooooooooooo." Then in harmony, "Nooooooooooooo."

How many of you here this morning need to learn this chant and sing it to each other often? Let's try it this morning:

Chant "Noooooooo" in unison.
Now chant "Nooooo" in harmony.

In the words of Montana psychologist Charlotte Kasl, "When you won't play the role of the one who gives all, or the nice guy, other people might feel hurt or be angry with you. Remember, whenever we carry others on our backs, both become cripples. By taking people off your back, you free them to learn to walk and you will feel lighter, happier, and more able to feel the breath of spirit. Most of all, as you get more comfortable in saying no, you can relax, laugh and start saying a true YES" (Charlotte Sophia Kasl, *A Home for the Heart: Creating Intimacy and Community With Loved Ones, Neighbors and Friends* [New York: HarperCollins, 1997], 72, 118).

In other words, the less stressed and burned out you are, the more open you are to love others without being fearful.

Number 5. Find someone new to "Barnabas" each week. Remember Barnabas? He was an "encourager." Who can you find to encourage in their journey through life? The best health insurance out there is relationships. Find someone to encourage and lift up.

As 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says: **Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.**

Number 4. Laugh a lot. The Latin root of the word humor means "fluid," like water. What keeps us fluid and flexible? The fluids of laughter and humor. We may not have a Bible quote that says Jesus laughed, but we have plenty that say God laughed. We do know that Jesus loved a good party and that he told jokes while teaching. One example is the story about seeing a speck in another's eye and neglecting a log in your own eye. Jesus was joyful.

Laughter is good medicine. People just might be more attracted to you when you are joyful, opening the door to love and acceptance – not fear.

Number 3. Find a way to "Go with God" in everything you do. My cousin said this in another way, "walk with God." One simple way you can do this is to never begin eating without bowing your head and giving thanks. Even in restaurants. Even in cars. Bow your head. A simple prayer of thanks reminds you three times a day that God is with you and you want to be with God.

"Go with God" by being faithful in going to church. A Duke University study of people over age 65 found that those who attended religious services at least once a week were less likely to have high blood levels of interleukin-6, a protein associated with various age-related diseases and disabilities.

Number 2. Find your own biblical mantra, and recite it whenever you feel the need. Find a Bible verse that is meaningful to you. Perhaps you could use 'perfect love casts out fear.' One of my favorites is 'God is my rock, my fortress, I will never be shaken.' That's from Psalm 62. If you have a favorite verse that brings you closer to God and clears your mind of fear and anxiety, tell it to me as we shake hands at the door after the service. I'd be interested to hear it.

Number 1. And finally -- the number one thing you can do to add years, not fears to your life --shift your prayer life from "Please, God" to "Please God." Take the comma out of those two words when you pray, and transition your praying from asking God for things to asking God for the pleasure of God's pleasure.

We talked about this in a recent sermon. Prayer isn't about changing God, but changing you. Changing you so you can grow closer to God so you can say: **The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?**

You want a future without fear, so you can love others and yourself? You want to add years, not fears to your life? These simple exhortations I've been sharing, as well as those of the Hebrews text, will bring you closer to God, less fearful and more open and able to do God's will in your life. Let me know how it goes.