

FEAR THAT STOPS US
September 30, 2012 – 2 Timothy 1: 3-10
The Church of the Covenant

I was serving a church that had a manse and the manse literally backed up to the town cemetery. My plants grew really well there because I had well water and the well head was right next to the cemetery so I always said I didn't need any fertilizer because I was fertilizing my plants with the saints of that little town! One evening, late at night, about this time of year, I had the windows open to the master bedroom in the manse and, even though I am a very sound sleeper, I heard what sounded like muffled voices, carrying on an animated conversation, and it awakened me, and the conversation sounded like it was coming from the town cemetery! Normally, as I liked to say, I had *REALLY* quiet neighbors! So this went on and on and I couldn't make out what was being said. It kept me from falling back to sleep and was incredibly annoying. So I had put up with it quite enough, thank you. So I rather angrily got up out of bed, put my bathrobe on, and went stomping toward the kitchen door. I was going to go out into that cemetery and tell them to shut up...at 2 o'clock in the morning...in pitch blackness...in a cemetery ...by myself. I got to the kitchen door, put my hand on the doorknob to open it, and stopped in my tracks. I thought to myself: "This is the way every bad horror movie begins—Bobby, what's that noise upstairs? I'll go up there and check it out myself." All that was missing was the ominous music. What was I thinking, going out into a dark cemetery, before Halloween, by myself, having heard muffled voices emanating from the darkened tombs? I went back to my bedroom, rolled the windows shut, and fell asleep. But the fear made me stoppable. It stopped me in my tracks. It was almost as if I couldn't turn the doorknob on the kitchen door. It was as if I couldn't move. Fear can do that to a person. Fear can stop us, even and maybe especially from doing a good thing, a God thing, taking the pathway that God wants us to take.

It is as if we come up to a door that God is opening for us, and we know there is actually something really good and beneficial on the other side, but we don't persevere and walk through the door. Jesus has promised: "*Behold, I set before you an open door that no one can shut.*" But we stop dead in our tracks. Indeed, as HE says about Himself: "*I am the door*". But nevertheless we hesitate. Jesus says: "*I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will enter in and sup with him.*" But we stand cemented into place; our hand on the doorknob but unable to move. Frozen by our fears. It is the FEAR THAT STOPS US...

What is the blessing that the Lord wants to bless us with, that we have not received, because our fear has stopped us?????

Our scripture is a great piece of advice from the older Apostle Paul to the younger son in the Lord, Timothy. He is reminding Timothy of the strong faith that dwelt first in Timothy's grandmother and mother. He reminds Timothy that this same faith, "*I am sure, dwells in you.*" (2 Timothy 1: 5) When we believe, when we receive Jesus as Lord and as Savior, the Lord comes and dwells in our heart by faith. Jesus comes personally and spiritually by the Holy Spirit to take up residency within our heart. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit our Savior, Jesus, dwells within our heart. It is the gospel. It is not our faith that causes this to happen; rather, it is Jesus' presence in our heart and life that causes us to have faith. So the first step in not living your life out of the fears that bind us, is to have God come and live within your heart. The fearless Christ who for the joy that was set before Him, gladly endured the cross for us and our salvation, dwelling in our heart, is the first step to being utterly fearless for God. The Apostle then goes on to instruct his young mentoree that if for whatever reason Timothy is finding himself beset by fears that stop him from both being and receiving blessings from God's Almighty hand,

that he can “*rekindle the gift of God that is within you*” (v. 6); he can go back to the hour he first believed and re-remember the power he received from the laying on of the hands of the Apostle Paul. When all the POWER of the Lord God dwells within you, because Jesus lives within you, because the Spirit lives within you, what can stop you in this life? If God be for us, who can be against us? What power on earth can stand in the way of the power from heaven? What creature can stop the power of the Creator? If lately you’ve been feeling less than bold for the Lord Jesus then maybe it is time to rekindle the gift of God that is within you???????

And then the Apostle tells the young Timothy that “*God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self control.*” (2 Timothy 1: 7) The Lord did not give us this holy power to make us timid, rather He gave us this power to make us bold. As the book of Hebrews says: “*Let us have BOLDNESS to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.*” (Hebrews 10: 19) We are not to be timid disciples. We are to take on large tasks for the Almighty. We are to boldly go where no man has gone before (as Captain Kirk on Star Trek used to say). We are to do large and God sized tasks for the Kingdom. Not on our own power; not our own plans; not through our own wisdom –NO! Rather we are to do it through the gift of God that is within us. From the Lord we have not received a spirit of timidity; from the Lord Jesus Christ we have received a spirit of boldness...a spirit of power and love and self control. That is the very thing that makes us unstoppable for God. This is the very thing that overpowers the fear that stops us.

I want us now to do a “fear inventory” for our lives. I want us to ask ourselves where should there be breakthroughs in our life but where have there not been breakthroughs? Ask ourselves: where should there be breakthroughs in my spiritual life? In my family? In my marriage? In my church? In my community? In my world? Where have there been things where I get right to the very doorstep, with my hand on the doorknob, the Lord may even be opening the door right before me, but I get stopped in my tracks, I become paralyzed with fear, and nothing happens? That will give you a hint where your fear has stopped you. I, by the way, am a craven coward. I want people to like me, and am a people-pleaser par excellence, and I am afraid that if I really challenged you to the depths of your souls, you would find some other preacher who you would like better and I would be out on the street with a tin cup. How many times in my life and ministry I have put my hand to the opening door only to stop, stopped by the fear that makes me stoppable. I’ve searched my soul even more deeply only to discover I have a fear of success, spiritual and otherwise. I honestly don’t believe I am ever worthy of receiving success from the hand of God. It is almost as if over and over again I will shoot myself in the foot, just as the door of spiritual opportunity is opening. My fear is that if I succeed something else bad will happen; something will come along to ruin it; when something good happens I am waiting, as the saying goes, for the other shoe to drop. For me I think, life and ministry is to be about suffering and painful endurance, not happiness, joy and new and abundant life. Anybody else have fears that make them stoppable? That keep really good things from happening in their life? That spirit of timidity can even bind the power of God, the power and love that wants to break forth and do some great and mighty work, within you, and around you, and through you? See, before you enter through the door the Lord is opening, and the Lord is always seeking to open a door for HIS beloved, you better ask yourself, what is the fear that will stop me? What is the very thing within my own heart that can even thwart the Almighty’s purpose? What is the fear that stops us?

I love a quote from Nelson Mandela. I know some people have varying views of the man. But he had an insight into people that I think speaks to what I am trying to preach today. At his 1994 Inaugural he wrote:

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.
We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?
Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God.
Your playing small doesn't serve the world.
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.
We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.
And as we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our own fear,
Our presence automatically liberates others.*

God has NOT given us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and love and self control.

You know, maybe Franklin Delano Roosevelt had it right, right after Pearl Harbor, maybe the only thing we really have to fear...is fear itself... For it is FEAR THAT STOPS US. And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*