Pastor Chuck’s Message

Bar Mills Community Church

Sunday, March 15, 2020

**Who’s Got your Back?**

Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:1, 4-8

The Apostle Paul writes to the Christians community in Philippi,

*“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! … Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”*

Reading this Scripture passage gets me to thinking about our son Matthew when he was about five-years-old and we were just having the most difficult time convincing my little guy to go to bed.

When I would say, Matt, you’ve got to go to bed! He would say, “But daddy, I don't want to go to bed. I want to stay down here with you.” You know how it goes, right? We would snuggle a little longer, continue to have this frustrating give and take and, finally, I would carry him up to his room, tuck him in and go down stairs only to hear the patter of little feet on the floor and trailing down the stairs with his blanket in tow and thumb in his mouth. After much reasoning and many excuses, Matt finally burst out with, but Daddy, I'm afraid of the dark!" There it was, unspoken fear and anxiety wrapped in five-year-old’s reluctance and resistance to go to bed. So, with my calm and reassuring wisdom I said, "Matt, buddy, there's nothing to be afraid of," "Daddy sleeps in the dark and I'm not afraid." And with those big brown eyes he looked me straight in the eye and said emphatically, "I know daddy, but you've got Mommy in your room to keep you safe!" You just can’t beat the logic and reason of a five-year-old! Fear and anxiety can do a number on us, can’t they?

So, this brings me to the question, “Have you heard about the Coronavirus?” Of course, you have. Everywhere you turn people are talking about it. In just the week I was away on vacation things have escalated exponentially. There is a lot of panic! I some cases, I think the viral fear about the virus is worse than the virus itself. Fear can have a paralyzing effect on all of us and I think we need to think about it for a moment, talk about it, pray about it and take the appropriate actions for it.

There are four distinct keys that have crossed my mind for us to consider as we move into the day ahead and they all begin with “P.”

**1. Be Pragmatic** – To be pragmatic means “to deal with things sensibly and realistically in reasonable and practical ways.” How we think and react to what is happening around us can make all the difference in our lives and ultimately, the outcome of the situation we face. Franklin Roosevelt famously said, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” This is so very true! “Nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror paralyzes,” making it difficult to move through the emotions of fear, uncertainty and the mind-numbing anxiety with it which often leads to the extreme and, ultimately, panic. We are seeing that happening across the country. How can we as Christians move through fear and uncertainty when so much of life is outside of our control? How do we face the uncertain without being overcome with anxiety?

Here are four important things to remember and think about when uncertainty threatens to overwhelm you.

A. Remember God's faithfulness throughout history.

The Biblical stories showcase God's faithfulness to His promises. My personal favorite is the story of Abraham beginning in Genesis 12. Called by God to leave his home and be a wandering nomad, Abraham lived with uncertainty every day. Where was he going? How was God going to provide him with a son? What if he was killed or taken into slavery by a foreign king? The most important part of Abraham’s story is not Abraham but God’s faithfulness to care for Abraham. Even when Abraham tried to take things into his own hands, God continued to work his plan for Abraham and Sarah despite the many obstacles. It didn’t happen the way they expected, and it took longer than they would have liked, but God did what he promised and provided for Abraham. Reading about these events shows us that God is a God who can be trusted to do what he promises and provide what we need. While the future is uncertain to us, the future is never uncertain for God.

B. Remember God is working even when we can’t see it.

Just because something didn’t happen the way we wanted it to or the way we imagined does not mean God has left us or forgotten about us. On the contrary, God is working in and through everything in our lives even when it seems He is absent. Again, we can turn to biblical events for evidence and comfort. Israel was promised a Messiah who took four hundred years to finally come. However, as God reminds them through his prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 29:11-13 *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.* *You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”*

Isaiah 41:10 *“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*

This future and hope finally came in God’s incarnate Son Jesus. God works through normal, everyday circumstances to bring about His plans for our lives, just as He did for His most important work, His plan of redemption. The Bible also tells us that while our knowledge is limited, God’s knowledge, wisdom, and power are unlimited. [Job 9:4](https://www.esv.org/Job%209%3A4-10/) *“His wisdom is profound;* *his power is vast.”* God’s work is often hidden from us and is brought about in ways that we don't see and, often, least expect.

Trusting in God is our ultimate remedy for fear. Yet, that is sometimes easier said than done. In fact, the more consumed with fear we become, the more distant God seems to be. As Christians, we are people of the Book! That is why when anxiety, fear and uncertainty grip your heart and pull you away, make every effort to stand on the promises of God and claim them as guarantee from God to you personally. David writes in Psalm 56:3-4, *“Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.* *In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?”*

C. Remember God always has a plan and it is always good.

Some people like to make plans while others like to live by the seat of their pants. Either way, the apostle James reminds us that ultimately God is in control of our lives.

[James in James 4:13-15](https://www.esv.org/Jm.%204%3A13-15/) writes, *“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit’— yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring…. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’”*

God works all things for our good ([Rom. 8:28](https://www.esv.org/Rom.%208%3A28/)). All good gifts, even every breath we take, come from Him, including things that don't seem like good gifts. When our plans don't go as planned, even then He is working to bring our lives closer to him. His infinite wisdom sees what we cannot see ([Prov. 16:9](https://www.esv.org/Prov.%2016%3A9/)).

D. Remember God has provided a secure eternal future.

Ultimately He works all things so that we would not lose our heavenly inheritance for we are heirs, “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” ([Rom. 8:17](https://www.esv.org/Rom.%208%3A17/)). The inheritance is the kingdom of God and it is yours. Christ secured an eternal future for his people that is as certain as the bread we eat and wine (or juice) we drink when we celebrate His death and resurrection in the Lord’s Supper. When times are uncertain and we are tempted to worry, meditate on this certainty; our God is a God who is always in control and who never lies or deceives us ([Tit. 1:1-3](https://www.esv.org/Tit.%201%3A1-3/)).

Our comfort through uncertainty is God’s unfailing and faithful love. He loves us and cares for us enough to faithfully bring us through this life into His kingdom, as He did for his Son through the resurrection ([1 Cor. 15](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%2015/)). There all our desires will be met and we will live the best of lives.

**2. Be Practical:**

* The experts all say the same thing. Wash your hands a lot and sing the verse of a hymn as you do to be sure you wash long enough. Don’t touch your face, keep surfaces clean. Wearing a mask won’t help unless you are sick. Just be practical.
* Expose yourself to what you need to know and don’t overload your senses. Remember, Satan is the author of confusion, chaos, disorder, death and destruction. 1 Corinthians 14:33 *“For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”*
* Overcoming fear means adjusting the way you think. What are you telling yourself when you feel anxious? Are you telling yourself the truth? Do your thoughts line up with what God tells you?

**3. Be Prayerful.**

We need to be praying about this. Today, March 15, 2020 has been declared by our President to be a National Day of Prayer. We need to pray continually for our church, for our community, for our nation that God would protect us. And the Lord can do that. He can put His shield around us. And we want to pray for anybody that has this virus that they would be healed and come through it quickly. 2 Chronicles 7:14 *“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.* ***15****Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.”*

Philippians 4:6-7, *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

(Please, Reference also 1 John 5:14; Mark 11:22-25; Matthew 6:6-8; Matthew 18:19-20; James 5:13-18; Luke 5:15-16; Romans 8:26-27; Luke 11:9-13)

**4. Proclamation:**

This is an opportunity to talk to people about Jesus Christ because people are freaking out! Here’s the thing. The Bible tells us, don’t worry about it, pray about it.

Philippians 4:6 Paul writes, *“Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”*

God is bigger than the Coronavirus, don’t be afraid! Remember in the Gospel of Matthew 14:22-23, when the disciples were on their storm-tossed boat on the sea of galilee. They began to panic; they began to “freak out!” They were absolutely and totally terrified of the storm until who shows up but Jesus walking on the water. Then they were afraid of Him, thinking “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.” And what did He say to them, *“Be of good courage and don’t be* *afraid.”* (See also Mark 4:35-41)

The key is this, keep your eyes on the Lord and looking to Him and following Him because He is the one who protects us and sustains us. I believe the Bible teaches that “a Christian is indestructible until God is done with them.” So, we don’t have to walk around living in fear. We are to walk around living in faith. In our finite humanity, we focus on the storm, we focus on the danger that is coming, we focus on the many voices that feed our fears, confuse our minds and trouble our souls with what do we do? What if? What if” What If?...

As Christians we need to remember that Paul says, in Philippians 4:7 *“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

And also, in 2 Timothy 1:7 *“For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love,* *and of a sound mind.”* This is what the Bible says. We must use this as an opportunity for proclamation and ministry.

Prayer:

Lord God, you are far greater than we could even think or imagine. You are the Sovereign God and Almighty King! You and you alone are worthy to be praised. We praise you Father, Son and Holy Spirit for the majestic, holy and loving God that you are. Thank you, Father for your Son Jesus, the wonder of the Cross, the Power of His shed blood and the Victory of His resurrection and ascension to your right hand.

Father, lead us through these uncertain days ahead and bring your peace and clam to our hearts and minds. We will not live in fear and despair. Please heal those with this virus and we ask that the numbers of infections will go down. Grant, we pray, wisdom to our President, Vice President and their team. Help them to know what to do, when to do it and the steps to take.

In Jesus Name, Amen

Note: My sermon resources, quotes and study material are always available upon request.