

WINNING THE WARS OF DAILY LIFE
“WINNING THE WAR OVER FEAR”
LUKE 12:1-7

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According to a public opinion poll, 40% of Americans fear public speaking, 36% fear heights, and 34% fear being closed in small spaces. According to these statistics, when I step into the pulpit to preach, my fear factor on a scale of 1-100 should be about 110. People ask me all the time if I still get nervous when I preach. The answer to that question is yes. To handle the Word of God and deal with things eternal ought to make us tremble, but there is a difference between awe and angst. I think that is what Jesus meant when he said to his disciples, *“I tell you my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. Instead, fear him who, after killing the body, has the power to throw you into hell”* (Luke 12: 4-5).

We live in an age of anxiety and fear. If the goal of the Al Qaeda was to instill fear into the hearts of Americans, they have succeeded. Yet Jesus said, don't let that kind of fear control you. You have a choice.

When I announced my subject for today, an elementary student came up to me and said, “When you preach about fear, use the words of Franklin Roosevelt.” “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” I don't know if Brandon has been reading American History or watching Dave Letterman, but Roosevelt was right. Fear, which causes nameless, unreasoning, unjustified, terror, paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.

So whether you are paralyzed by the thought of another terrorist attack or just afraid to speak up in public, here are some fear busters that Jesus suggests and I have found helpful.

AVOID HYPOCRISY

“Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy”
(Luke 12:1b).

The number one excuse people give for disassociating themselves from a church is that they don't want to be around a crowd of hypocrites. My rebuttal is always the same. “Come to church anyway; another hypocrite can't hurt us that much.”

While no one of us is perfect, it behooves us by the grace given to us to live real, authentic, genuine, honest, lives. Christianity is not for talented actors or great

pretenders. It is for repentant sinners of whom Paul said, "I am chief."

Jesus had few kind words for hypocrites, especially religious ones. They like to be complimented for their long, flowery prayers, so people will come up to them and say, "What a pretty prayer."

Hypocrites, said Jesus, like their philanthropy announced with trumpets, written up in the newspapers and reported in the synagogues. "*I tell you,*" said Jesus, "*they have their reward in full.*"

Hypocrites, said Jesus, disfigure their faces when fasting to alert the world to their righteousness. Every once in a while, a hospital information volunteer will look me in the eye and say, "You're a pastor, aren't you?" I reply, "Why yes, how could you tell?" They respond, "You just look like one." Down in my heart it causes me to wonder, "Have I sacrificed my soul for a role?"

Hypocrisy produces fear. If you become your act, then pressure mounts to keep people believing. The mask becomes essential to your identity and you live in the fear that someone will find you out. That's why:

Top dogs are lonely.

Pop stars get hooked on drugs and alcohol.

Sports heroes fly off the handle and hurt people.

Ministers hang out in brothels.

Jesus says that kind of fear will kill you. Get real! God prefers blunt, honest sinners over slick-talking pretenders.

EMBRACE THE LIGHT

"There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs

(Luke 12:2-3).

An Afghan woman explained to the Chicago Tribune why she kept wearing her burka, her full body clothing, even though she was no longer required to dress that way. Her explanation was straightforward and simple. "We have lived in the darkness so long we are now afraid of the light." I suspect a lot of people could say that. Any time fear forces you to hiddenness, the devil is managing to hold you hostage. There is no room in the Christian life for closed door deals, under the table negotiations, and dirty little secrets in families.

While the subjects of concealment can be multiple, none is more damaging than sexual abuse and harassment. Fifty percent of teenage pregnancies are caused by adult men having sex with underage girls. One-fourth of all girls and one-sixth of all

boys will be sexually abused by age 18. Enlightenment has revealed to us that even people in the church engage in these sins.

If you are a child or a teenager, or an adult here today struggling with messy feelings of sadness, resentment, or rage that won't go away because someone said, "Let's keep this little secret between us," stop hiding. End the shame, find someone who cares, speak the truth, feel the feelings. Do what you have to do to find health.

If you are here today, trespassing on somebody's personhood, stop it! Healing is possible. There is mercy with the Lord, but you cannot do it on your own. It's time to put an end to family secrets.

KNOW GOD

Soul snatchers are to be feared more than body killers, says Jesus. There are all kinds of false gods that delight in giving people hell.

I am troubled these days that Christians as well as Muslims have surrendered to the god of hate. Such fear and prejudice will steal your soul. If there is any value in "fearing the Lord," let it be a fear born of respect, awe, wonder, reverence. With apologies to Jonathan Edwards, we are not "sinners in the hand of an angry God." We are children in the presence of a loving Father.

When Martin Luther was a young priest, he struggled mightily with his own sinfulness and felt constantly terrified of God's judgment. Finally, an older priest said to Martin, "God is not angry with you. You are angry with God. You need to find a merciful God, a God whom you can love and a God who loves you." "How can I do that?" inquired Martin. "Look to Christ. Bind yourself to Christ and say to him, 'I am yours, Save Me.'" That's what Martin did.

When we find a better God, we will become a better people. Here is the real nature of God, says Jesus.

His eye is on the sparrow, and you are worth more than a bird.

The hairs of your head are numbered by God himself.

The Bible says:

"Surely, it is God who saves us; let us trust in him and not be afraid."

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil..."

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?"

"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy..."

Why not give your fears to God and be free?