

February 9, 2014

Jesus Calling **“Trust in Me and Don’t Be Afraid”**

Biblical Text: Isaiah 12:2-6

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This is the final message in our series, **“Jesus Calling,”** based on Sarah Young’s best-selling daily devotional book.¹ Today’s devotion invites us to turn away from our fears and trust in God. Fear is a big deal for us.

That’s why the Bible addresses it so often. Over and over, God invites us to trust in him, saying, **“Do not be afraid.”** And so you’ll know that I’m not just exaggerating here about that, I decided to *check it out*. (open Bible)

I did a quick analysis of the New Revised Standard Version and the phrase **“Do not be afraid”** appears sixty-seven times. **“Do not fear”** - fifty-seven additional times. **“Have no fear”** - eleven more times. *See what I mean?*

In addition to those, First John 4:18 promises this: **“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear...”**² It’s a good message for the week before Valentine’s Day. Love is stronger than fear.

But we can’t take love for granted. **Husbands and boyfriends, consider this an early warning message today.** Next Friday is Valentine’s Day. If you get to Saturday before you remember – ***it’s not my fault - and it won’t be good!***

And if that kind of love is important, consider how much more important the love of God is our lives. But sometimes we forget that God’s love conquers our deepest fears - that faith is stronger than fear. Too often, in our daily, non-Sunday morning lives, fear seems stronger our faith.

Rev. Bill Selby says it this way. **“There are only four basic emotions, mad, sad, glad, and scared. And the one we react to the most, is scared.”**³ And our fears are often unresolved - it doesn’t take much for them to rise up!

An attempted plane hijacking in Istanbul interrupted news coverage about the Winter Olympics this week. It turned out to be just some wacky guy. So, why did it become a news item? ***Our fear rose to the surface.***

¹ Sarah Young, *Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace in His Presence*. Copyright © 2004, Thomas Nelson Press.

² 1 John 4:18, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, Copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

³ Rev. Bill Selby, *Center for Pastoral Effectiveness of the Rockies*.

It happens on a personal level as well. Fears of failure, abandonment, not being good enough - of particular people, situations, circumstances, or surrounding. And it doesn't take much to trigger those fears.

About ten years ago, I learned to trust God in my fears and to pray, *"All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."*⁴

I wish I had known that prayer earlier in life!

I remember my first Sunday as a pastor because of Joe. He had been the head usher for twenty years, and had seen lots of preachers come and go.

So, my very first service started this way. I solemnly said, *"Let us pray,"* and just as I began to pray, we heard Joe's loud voice from the back, *"Hey, can you usher? - I'm short one this morning."* *Welcome to Church work!*

For nine years, Joe was the first person I saw on Sunday. We developed a routine. I would ask, *"How's it going?"* Once in a great while he would say, *"God's in his heaven and all's right with the world!"* But most of the time it was this, *"According to the news, the world's going to hell in a hand-basket, preacher!"* There was no in-between. Either everything was great, or it was awful! And most of the time, according to the news and Joe, it was awful.

But Isaiah's message in our text is different! He dares to say that even when things are awful, even when the world and we are *"going to hell in a hand-basket"* even then, *God is still in charge - and all will be right with the world!* I first came to know our text from Isaiah 12:2-6 as Canticle 9, *"The First Song of Isaiah,"* from the Book of Common Prayer. I love its metrical setting.

*"Surely, it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid.
For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense, and he will be my Savior.
Therefore you shall draw water with rejoicing, from the springs of salvation.
And on that day you shall say, Give thanks to the Lord, and call upon his Name"*⁵

Isaiah's message is one of judgment for the sins of the people.

Yet, even in the midst of that message, Isaiah offers the promise that even in the desert of failure and fears, the people of God... *"...shall draw water with rejoicing from the springs of salvation."*

⁴ 14th Century. Julian of Norwich. *Revelations of Divine Love*. Translated by Clifton Wolters. Penguin, Copyright © 1966.

⁵ *Ecce Deus*, Canticle 9, "The First Song of Isaiah" from *The Book of Common Prayer*. Copyright © 1979, The Episcopal Church (USA.) The BCP is in the public domain in the United States of America.

According to Biblical Scholar, Walter Brueggeman, Isaiah offers the invitation of God to the kind of faith that brings a *“buoyant and determined hope that refuses to give in to debilitating present circumstances.”*⁶

That kind of faith will help us get out of bed in the morning.

Not because of what kind of day the daily news will tell us that it is going to be, but because whatever is on the news, what ever fears and anxieties we face, we can trust in God! *“I will trust in him and not be afraid.”* (Isaiah 12:2)⁷

Or as Sarah Young’s devotion for today puts it, *“Hardships are part of the journey... Trust me and don’t be afraid, for I am your Strength and Song.”*⁸

Every Sunday, pastors like me face congregations filled with people who look a lot like the people of Judah to whom Isaiah prophesied long ago. We feel a long way from where we thought we would be. Our lives and our naïve theology are often interrupted by circumstances, anxieties and fear.

But God’s message comes - and it is not one of judgment alone, but of salvation. *“Trust in me and don’t be afraid.”*

It was Isaiah’s persistent message - generation after generation in the time of exile. As one prophetic voice bearing the prophet’s name gave way to the next, Isaiah invited the people to look beyond their daily reality and remember that God holds history in his hand.

Even when we are wandering in the wilderness of fear or walking through the desert of anxiety, God promises us, in the words of the Isaiah 43:19: *“I will make a way in the wilderness and bring rivers to the desert.”*⁹

What if we dared to believe and trust that was true?

Even today, if you listen, you can hear Isaiah’s voice echo across the centuries, and beneath it and behind it, the whisper of God’s voice saying:

“Trust in me. My strength is sufficient. I am with you. Don’t be afraid.”

⁶ Walter Brueggeman in Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, Vol. 1. Copyright © 2009, Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, Pg. 61.

⁷ Op. Cit. *First Song of Isaiah*, Book of Common Prayer.

⁸ Op. Cit. Sarah Young, *Jesus Calling*, Page 42

⁹ Op. Cit. Isaiah 43:19. *New Revised Standard Version.*