

“Talk about Trust”

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First Presbyterian Church Kingwood

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I want to talk to you today about trust. But in order to talk to you about trust, I need to start out talking to you about something else. It actually a number of names. But let's start out with just one. Let's start out by talking about anxiety.

Nine years ago an article appeared in a news magazine called "The Report." It's a Canadian magazine put out by the same company that publishes "Time" here in America. And in January 2001 an article appeared in "The Report." It was titled "The Age of Anxiety." The subtitle though was what caught my eye. It said, "Ordinary children today are more fearful than psychiatric patients were in the 1950s!"

Now since I'm a parent, I read the article. And this is the way it starts. "If the average child of today were placed in a time machine and flashed back to the year 1957, he might be institutionalized as emotionally disturbed. The reason? His high level of anxiety.

Jean Twenge, Professor of Psychology at San Diego State University in California, has recently analyzed five decades worth of scientific data. She has found that, based on scores for anxiety in the decade of the 1950's, today's children are, on average, in the 84th percentile. That's dangerously high."

"Dr. Twenge believes her findings are a reflection of larger social trends. And children," she says, "have been left with a sense of isolation, insecurity and "free-floating anxiety."

Anxiety, of course, is just another name for a kind of fear, and fear is the "something else" I want to talk to you about this morning before I get back to the title of this sermon and talk to you about trust. So let's talk about fear because the truth is whether you call it concern, or anxiety or worry or apprehension or anything else, you're really talking about fear. And it turns out the Bible talks about fear too. In fact, it talks about it a lot.

Now it may come as a surprise to some. But it turns out one of the most frequent commands in the Bible doesn't begin with the word "don't." It begins with the word "fear." And the command is "fear not."

"Fear not" God tells Isaac after his father Abraham dies. "Fear not" God tells Jacob when he's about to go down to Egypt. "Fear not" God tells Israel through Moses when they're about to enter the promised land. And God keeps on telling people to "fear not" through the whole Old Testament. Then the New Testament begins with the announcement of Jesus' birth and the first words the angel speaks to Mary are "fear not."

And it turns out those same words or their equivalent are some of Jesus' favorite words too. Of the 125 commands Jesus speaks in the New Testament, the most repeated one is ... that's right; "fear not."

It was Max Lucado who taught me that fact. For last year Max published a book called *Fearless*. And in the book he writes this. "The Gospels list some 125 Christ-issued imperatives. Of these 21 urge us to 'not be afraid' or 'have courage' or 'take heart' or 'be of good cheer.' The second most common command, to love God and neighbor, appears on only 8 occasions!"

Then he writes something even more significant than the statistics, at least it was to me, "If quantity is any indicator," he says, "Jesus takes our fears seriously." And I suspect that's why in John chapter 8 Jesus says to the crowds at the Feast of Tabernacles, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

For part of the Feast of Tabernacles for observant Jews in Jesus' days meant living not only in tents, but living with only the natural light of the day and night. For when Israel wandered through the wilderness, that's what they did. And the fear of the dark is a little bit more real in that sort of existence. So when day breaks Jesus goes to the temple, stands up and proclaims, "I am the light of the world."

And as you probably noticed, the Pharisees immediately interrupt him. They challenge what he's saying. And if you wondered why they did it, the reason's because they knew their Old Testament. And they knew the Scripture that Jesus was referencing. It was Psalm 27, the Psalm of David, the Psalm that begins, "The Lord is my light." So immediately they challenged him, John says,

because they understood that when he proclaimed "I'm the light of the world," he was really saying "I'm the Lord."

And he was. And he is. And he always will be. But if we believe that, we need to realize this. If we call Jesus Lord we need to learn to call on him. If we call Jesus Lord we need to learn to call on him in the dark and fearful times of our lives. If we call Jesus Lord, we need to call on him to be our light.

Because the truth is we all need his light because there are dark times in all of our lives. Maybe you've had some recently. Maybe they're talking layoffs where you work or you're apprehensive about slowdowns in the economy. Maybe you're fearful of the flare ups in the Middle East or the downturns in the real estate or the stock market. Whatever it is, whatever it is for you, you know the feeling, don't you? You know what it's like to be anxious or apprehensive or worried or whatever else you want to name that feeling.

But the big question I want to ask you this morning isn't about the feeling. The big question I want to ask you this morning is this. What do you do with it? What do you do when that feeling rises up inside you? Here's something you could do. It probably isn't something you'd naturally do. I don't either. But believe it or not, I think it's something God hopes will become a habit for us. For I believe God hopes we'll learn to let fear function in our lives as a call to pray, to pray a prayer of trust, to pray a prayer like Psalm 27.

"The Lord," the Psalm says, "is my light and my salvation - whom shall I fear?" And the most important words in that opening line are the first two words, "The Lord." So let's me pause for a moment and tell you a story that I think explains part of what it means to start a prayer with those words.

John Ortberg's one of my favorite story-tellers, and this is story comes from him. "Many years ago," he writes, "I was walking in Newport Beach in Southern California with two friends. Two of us were on staff together at a church, and one was an elder there."

"One night we walked past a bar where a fight had been going on. And as we walked by it spilled out into the street, just like an old western. Several guys were beating up another guy, and he was bleeding from his forehead. We knew we had to do something, so we walked toward them to try and break up the fight. I don't think we were very intimidating. All we did was say 'Hey guys, cut it out!' And it didn't do much good. They just looked at us.

But all of a sudden their expressions changed. We didn't know why until we turned and looked behind us. Then I understood. Out of the bar had come the biggest man I think I've ever seen. He was something like six feet seven inches, maybe 300 pounds and maybe 2 percent body fat. He was just huge! And he didn't say a word. He just stood there and flexed. You could tell he was hoping they would start something with him.

All of a sudden," John writes, "when I saw him I got courage. I said to the guys in the fight who were starting to leave 'You better not let us catch you coming round here again!' I was a totally different person because my large friend had shown up. My anxiety was gone. I was filled with confidence.

And a moment later, as we walked away, I said to my friends, 'What if Bubba, (that's why we decided to call him because we didn't know his name) 'What if Bubba,' I said, were with us all the time? What if we knew that we could count on him being with us to protect us 24 hours a day?'

I like that line. And the reason I like it is because it reminds me of a line that we find in the Bible over and over again. It's the line we find in Psalm 27. It's the line that tells us that someone who's bigger than Bubba is willing to walk through life with us. And we don't have to wonder when he'll show up because he's told us, promised us, "I'm with you, always."

So here's the point. If you believe that promise, you don't have to be afraid because you have a great big Bubba of a God. And He's promised to protect you, no matter where, no matter when, no matter what and no matter who. That's why they call Him "The Lord."

But if you ever forget, or if you ever find yourself in a situation where you need reminding, remember. Just turn to Psalm 27. Read the words aloud to yourself and read them slowly. And realize as you're reading that you're praying, praying a prayer of trust.

Because the Book of Psalms is a Prayer Book, a prayer designed to show us how to pray. And one of the prayers we most need to learn about is a prayer of trust. Because God hopes we'll understand that we can take our fear and turn it into trust.

So learn to recognize that your fear is really a call to prayer. And learn to use Psalm 27 as your prayer. Learn to say the opening sentence to yourself,

whenever you feel fear. And let the opening words of Psalm 27 remind you we have a great big Bubba of a God who has promised to make his presence felt in your life alongside your fears.

Let's pray