

Title: "Fearless" July 7, 2024

Please pray with me. Gracious God may our time together today be pleasing in your eyes. May the words from my mouth be the words you want spoken. May your Holy Spirit surround us all and reveal what we need to hear today. Amen

Good morning, Hope Mennonite. A couple of months ago, Pastor Randy contacted me and said that he thought it would be a good idea for the congregation to hear from the moderator the first Sunday after his tenure with us had ended. And, I agreed to be here, in the pulpit today. I mean how could I tell him no after he had spent a year and a half of his retirement with us. I also thought – I have plenty of time to pull together some thoughts. Well life happened, as it does, and I found myself this week wondering what I could possibly share with you today.

I briefly considered saying – "Well done Hope Mennonite. Keep up the good work. Peace to all. Early release." But that didn't seem quite right and while it might be a welcome message for some, it might leave most feeling a bit shortchanged for the week. So, I pulled together some random notes from the past several months and will share today what is on my heart.

It has been about 3 years since I was last in this pulpit...and what a three years it has been! When I delivered a message back then, there were many things on my mind and heart, however, in full transparency this time, I

find myself a content moderator. Now, please don't take that as a challenge, or be alarmed – I mean there is a lot going on for us – however recently I've had an overwhelming sense of calm and assuredness.

Just as before, my brain is still stuffed full of song lyrics and movie quotes. I continue to think if I could release some of that information, I'd have a lot more mental space, but alas, there is no shaking the Brady Bunch, Mary Tyler Moore Show, or Golden Girls theme songs. But, my God knows who I am and often speaks to me through these unconventional methods. I can't promise there are not some lyrics and quotes mixed in this morning however, I'll try to keep it to a minimum.

I also shared with you 3 years ago my journey to have confidence that the Holy Spirit was speaking to me or in the congregation – rather than my strong-willed ideas. In the way of an update, I am still pursuing this knowledge however, God is good and has offered me many, many clear and sometimes glaring signs of reassurance, despite my sometimes-self-inflicted fear.

So that brings me to my main subject this morning. Fearless. Fearless is my star word for 2024. When I pulled my star from the basket, I was in the middle of learning about Taylor Swift. While I was a fan of some of her music, I really wondered what made her such an icon, role model and what caused such vitriol towards her from some people. I knew one of her early albums was titled Fearless and thought maybe it was a sign. And it is true, there are many fabulous life lessons in Taylor's lyrics - I did not readily find the answers to what my star word meant to me. I was stuck hoping the Holy Spirit would come through and, that meaning and understanding would deepen and become clearer over time.

I started as I often do – looking for scriptures that speak to fearless. Nothing. However, I did find a reference to courage. Now while courage and fearless aren't quite the same – somehow the word courage resonates with

me. For me it denotes moving forward regardless of how I feel. I can have both courage and fear at the same time. Now that is something I could work with.

As you heard in the scriptures, we have many reassurances to remain calm and wait or trust in the Lord. In fact, we are not only told to not to fear but to actually, be courageous in trust. As someone who routinely must manage my control freakiness, this is not a small task. It is very hard for me to wait and trust.

I decided to take a look at where I was afraid in my life and how I could go about applying courage and faith to diminish that fear. Where did I need to wait upon the Lord and where did I need to take action. I mean, I had always heard that fear and faith cannot exist in the exact same moment at the same time. I can sure oscillate quickly between the two and how could I increase my faith where fear was winning the battle.

A quick evaluation revealed that fear was thriving in a few areas of my life:

- Personally – fear I couldn't fully achieve and sustain my health goals
- Within my family – changes in health status of loved ones and strained relationships made me afraid and sad
- For our country and the world – I have fear that hate and corruption are taking over?
- Even here at Hope – what does our future hold for us? What if there really are no pastors available for permanent placement?

While I do not quite have all these fears worked out completely, I can offer a mid-year star word reflection and my current approach toward living fearlessly.

First, be fearless in asking for help. I must remember I am not alone.

Others have experienced whatever I am experiencing and there is much to be learned in collective wisdom.

Second, be fearless in my willingness to change. However painful or difficult, I must remain open to changing and being changed. I mean, I tell my niece and nephew, both biological ones and those I've adopted, that just because something is hard, or it is something I don't know how to do doesn't mean it is wrong or that I am wrong, or that I cannot learn to do it. I mean, Tom Hanks reminds us of this in the movie, "A League of Their Own," "It's supposed to be hard. If it wasn't hard, everyone would do it. The hard is what makes it great"

Thirdly, be fearless in loving one another. How can I truly practice unconditional positive regard for everyone. According to psychologist Carl Rogers, this means showing complete support and acceptance of people no matter what. It doesn't mean I have to agree, but it does help me approach others with respect and remember that we are all children of God.

Lastly, be fearless to serve. My fear is usually diminished, and my faith increased when I take action. I recognize that serving as your moderator has helped me feel less fearful and powerless during our time of transition. This is a gift that I could have never imagined. As I learn how to take actions to live out my faith, serve the marginalized in our society, and take action, I am able to walk in more faith.

These small steps help me stay open to the Holy Spirit's guidance. They help me make room in my life for goodness and help me be more comfortable to wait upon the Lord to show me the direction to take to be the kind of person I want and God wants me to be. I'm not sure if it is connected, but that sense of calm and assuredness I mentioned at the beginning might just be the Holy Spirit helping me be fearless.

These steps are most helpful to me in my role as moderator. As I have, and will continue to, ask for help, remain open to change, love you all and serve, I am confident that my path and our collective future will be in good

hands.

So, I'll wrap up with this prayer, please join me. Gracious God, thank You for Your promise to be with us wherever we go. When we are tempted to doubt and fear, help us remember that You are with us. In light of this promise, may we be strong and courageous no matter what we face. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture References:

- 2 Timothy 1:7 ~ For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.
- Deuteronomy 31:6 ~ Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."
- Psalm 31:24 ~ Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord!
- Psalm 27:14 ~ Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

Benediction

As we part from here today, I will leave you with some paraphrased lyrics from Taylor Swift and her song Fearless.

I don't know how it gets better than this

You take my hand and we are Fearless

And I don't know why, But with you I'd dance in a storm

In my best dress, Fearless

May you all find places of courage and beauty in the waiting on the Lord. May you experience all that is to be Fearless. Go in peace.