

June 2, 2019

What Frightens You?

2 Kings 13:20-21

Opening words: Did you know that within the Bible there are nine resurrection stories? Including Jesus, six are found in the New Testament. Jesus resurrected three: the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:13-15), Jairus' daughter (Matthew 9:25) and Lazarus (John 11:43-44). Peter resurrected Tabitha (Acts 9:36-42) and Paul raised Eutychus (Acts 20:9-12). That leaves three in the Old Testament. Today, we look at one of those three.

We find ourselves today in Second Kings, the story of Elisha's bones. For the story to make sense, you need to know how burial practices have changed. In our time and place, our cemeteries are filled with private graves. Everyone has their own grave, casket and vault. Arlington National Cemetery is a classic example. That is not the story in Old Testament times. I know this is hard to hear, but in their time, the deceased were buried with others who had passed. Everyone was placed into a common cave. The smell must have been potent, so a large stone had to be rolled in front of the opening to contain the stench. The job of placing the corpse in the cave must have been the worst job. Our scripture reading for today is 2 Kings 13:20-21. Let me call this message *What Frightens You?*

2 Kings 13:20-21

Elisha died and was buried.

Now Moabite raiders used to enter the country every spring. ²¹ Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet.

George Patton (1885-1945) was a General in the United States Army during World War II. He once said, "*I never take counsel from my fears.*" I do my best, but I am no George Patton. I have some fears. If you will admit you have some fears, say, **"Amen!"**

I love this story. Did you know the White House was wired for electricity in 1891? However, it was not necessarily welcomed by the sitting President, Benjamin Harrison (1833-1901) or his wife, Caroline (1832-1892). They refused to touch the light switches because they were afraid of getting shocked. It was rumored they slept with the lights on when no one was around to turn the lights off. They preferred the old oil lantern system. (Because open flames are much safer than electricity 😊) Fear makes us do funny things. So let me ask you the question of the day: What frightens you?

There is no shortage of fears in our society. Maybe you have one of these. This is a common list that is found on a variety of websites.

1. Fear of flying
2. Fear of public speaking
3. Fear of heights
4. Fear of the dark
5. Fear of intimacy
6. Fear of flowers
7. Fear of driving
8. Fear of snakes
9. Fear of needles
10. Fear of spiders
11. Fear of dogs

How many of those things do you fear? Since we are speaking of fears, let me ask you this series of questions.

Does anyone here fear aging? That is a common fear. My goal is to get older. So, why do people fear aging? According to the Huffington Post, people fear aging for five reasons. They are based on stereotypes.

1. Old people always get sick and have chronic pain.
2. Old people suffer from memory loss.
3. Old people lose their attractiveness.
4. Old people can't learn new things.
5. Old people are lonely and grumpy.

This is my opinion: Aging bothers us because it means we are closer to death. Aging is not one of my fears. Does anyone here fear aging? What frightens you?

Does anyone here fear illness or disease? The other day, I did a funeral for a man who was a few years older than I. According to the family, he was completely healthy, until he fell and broke his hip. In the emergency room they noticed something funny. No one laughed, because when the test came back, it showed he was filled with cancer. Over a short six-month period, the man went from the life of the party to terminal. I hope that isn't my story someday. I will admit it, medical issues frighten me. Have you ever wondered about your cause of death? Does anyone here fear illness or disease? What frightens you?

Does anyone here fear the future? How many churches do you know that are afraid of the future? Perhaps it is a lack of faith or trust? How many people do you know fear the future? I believe, many fear the future because they fear change. Psychologists tell us, we fear the future because we feel a lack of control. I do not fear the future now, but I may in the future. Does anyone here fear the future? What frightens you?

Does anyone here fear for their own security? On Friday night, I was out with friends. We were at a concert when I got the news about the shooting in Virginia Beach. A disgruntled employee opened fire at a municipal building. Now twelve families are mourning the loss of a loved one. I will be honest, when I got the news, I looked around to examine the audience. Everyone looked safe, but who really knows. We live in such a violent society. Does anyone here fear for their own security? What frightens you?

Does anyone here fear loneliness? On Memorial Day, Kathryn and I celebrated our thirty-first anniversary. We got married in a friend's backyard. The next day, we went to a Cleveland Indians game, followed by a trip to Florida. It is hard to believe we have been married for thirty-one years. Time is moving fast. I will be the first to admit it: We have good lives. We have big lives. Do you know my greatest fear? My greatest fear in life is not my death. It is her death. I don't want to live in this world without her. I don't want to live in this world alone. Is there someone in your life you can't live without? It would be a horrible thing to outlive your children. Does anyone here fear loneliness? I do. What frightens you?

Does anyone fear the loss of independence? I try to visit at least one person every day. The other day, I was out visiting. As I walked down the hall of a local nursing home, I noticed an elderly gentleman sitting in his room in a wheelchair with a large bandage on his nose. His eyes were glassy, and I could feel his broken spirit. The depression poured out of the room. One of the aides was helping him to the bathroom. There was no privacy. The door was wide open. I thought about that man with the large bandage on his nose the rest of the day. I hope that is not my future. I like my big independent life. Does anyone fear the loss of independence? What frightens you? If you admit you are afraid periodically, say, "**Amen!**" That takes us to this morning's scripture lesson. Does anyone here fear death?

In our scripture lesson for this morning, the Israelites were afraid of the Moabite raiders. The scripture lesson is easier to memorize than it is to understand. It was springtime. We look forward to spring because we have grown tired of the harsh winter weather. In their time and place, they must have dreaded the spring. For it was during the spring that the Moabite raiders came. (The Moabites were mountainous people in that region of the world.) They did not come for a social visit; they came for military action. Their unannounced raids brought death and destruction. The Israelites were preoccupied every spring with these unwanted visitors.

That is what happened in the text. Someone had died and they were placing the body in the community tomb. Normally, the body was treated with respect. When the raiders suddenly appeared, the normal activity of treating the dead with respect was disrupted. According to verse 21, the frightened Israelites threw the corpse in the tomb, or cave, so the living could flee for safety. This is where the story takes an unusual turn. We do not know the identity of the deceased, but it is safe to say he was the luckiest person in

the region. He was thrown into the same tomb that held the remains of Elisha. According to verse 20, Elisha had been gone for more than sixty years. There was nothing left of the old prophet but his bones. However, his bones were enough. When the corpse of the recently dead man hit the bones of Elisha, the man was resurrected. It is an odd story, but it does demonstrate for us the power of God. Listen to this next line. The Israelites were afraid, but God was with them the whole time. That is our story. We have our fears, but God is with us; so we really have nothing to fear. If you believe in a great big God, say, "**Amen!**"

As we come to the communion table, I would encourage you to do two things. First, admit your fears. They are part of the human experience. Second, I would encourage you to look for God. With God all things are possible. Every day, we play the part of the Israelites. We have grown blind to God, who is in our very midst. How much time do you spend looking for God? How much time do you spend examining your human limitations? How much time do you spend worrying about your human fears?

One of the great stories in the Bible is the rich young ruler. It is found in all three of the synoptic Gospels; Matthew, Mark and Luke. You know the story. I have referred to it many times over the years. It seemed like he had everything. He was rich, so he could buy what he desired. He was young, so he had a future. He was a ruler, so he had influence. The only thing he lacked was salvation. He went to Jesus to ask him a question that had been eating away at his soul, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" It is an excellent question. The Master answered, "Sell everything and give your money to the poor. Then, follow me." The rich young ruler didn't like the answer. He left upset because he couldn't do it. Jesus says, money is more of a curse to your soul than a blessing. It is harder for a rich man to get into heaven than it is for a camel to get through the eye of a needle. Then, Jesus reminds us of the power of God. He said, "*With God, all things are possible.*" We have nothing to fear, because with God all things are possible. If you believe all things are possible with God, say, "**Amen!**" Then why are you afraid?

One of the great names in western civilization history is Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821). As a French military and political leader, he dominated European affairs for nearly two decades. He feared nothing, except one thing: cats! He wasn't alone. Hitler, Mussolini and Julius Caesar also feared cats! That leads us back to our question of the day: What frightens you? Do not be afraid. With God, all things are possible. Do you remember the quote from General George Patton? He once said, "*I never take counsel from my fears.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"