

Message #4 During Covid-19 Pandemic: On Sabotaging Fear

Psalm 121; Matthew 6:25-34; Mark 6:46-51; 1 John 4:18

In last Sunday's message, I challenged you to engage yourself bravely and wisely in a struggle to save the world—including your world—from what the peerless *Chronicles of Narnia* author C. S. Lewis called “enemy occupied territory” — in our case—territory that is now occupied everywhere by an enemy known as the Covid-19 virus.

That message remains true today—and will remain true for the foreseeable future! You can find my message in writing on the church's website, or in a video lower on this Facebook page.

Our mission remains urgent and will remain urgent for some time to come!

You must be aggressive and persistent in your secret, spiritual campaign to sabotage the enemy's advance.

No retreat!

No letting up!

No taking your eye off the target!

No delusion about the enemy and the territory the enemy already occupies.

I shared with you my own personal struggle with a health threatening virus that attacked me in my inner ear 10 months ago.

Now I do not enjoy making myself dizzy on a regular basis in order to recalibrate my brain.

I do not enjoy standing on an undulating Bosu ball with my eyes shut for as long as I can stay standing, in order to teach my brain to change the way it receives signals from my damaged inner ear organs.

But, just as a cancer patient knows the importance of painful treatments— just as an AIDS patient knows the importance of life saving drugs—just as a person with a knee replacement knows why to follow directions given by what dark humorists call the physical terrorist— I know that is the only way to recovery.

We can't go back to normal at the moment, because there is no normal to go back to.

We must create a new normal, and that cannot happen without depriving the enemy of the territory it now occupies.....**pause**.....

But there is another territory which the enemy also occupies.

That territory is inside your mind and inside my mind.

And at a deeper level, the terrain it seeks to conquer is within our souls.

We must meet the enemy there as well—because, as the luminous Howard Thurman has pointed out, the worst thing that can happen to us when evil begins to spread and take hold—is the disintegration of our souls.

Jesus knew this truth firsthand. Why not? Jesus is only the smartest person in the Bible!

Jesus said, *“Fear not those who can kill the body, but those who will kill the soul.”*

Fear not! Do you hear that?

Because the deeper enemy we must encounter and undermine is FEAR.

The front lines in this battlefield are doctors, nurses and other health care workers and they will tell you that they are not just fighting a virus.

First they must fight their own FEAR

FEAR now wants to occupy all our souls.

Your soul! Your thoughts! Your day. Your night! Your sleep.

FEAR wants to steal your hopes! And your future! What you thought it would look like! Even if you are a child or teenager with a certain vision of what you would be doing this spring or summer.

FEAR wants to steal your camaraderie with others.

FEAR wants to prevent you from becoming conscious of your connection to other beings, to your best self, and ultimately to God.....

Now!— there are very good reasons to have fears—for example, the fear of ignorance is the springboard to learning—the fear of disease is the energy for finding cures and vaccines and treatments.

However, important as it is to acknowledge the positive dimension of creature fear, this is not the main reason for our message today.....

There are also excellent reasons for **examining** our fears.

Seeing whether they are real or imagined.

Researching the facts!

Fortifying yourself against rumors, propaganda, misinformation, and you're your own personal questions and doubts.

You don't want to go away thinking it only threatens the elderly. That's not going to help you, and in fact it can hurt. A superb source of information about this virus and the pandemic is John Hopkins University School of Medicine Coronavirus Resource Center. <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/>

We **should** take time to doubt and examine our fears, especially when so many people— politicians, advertisers, charlatans and scammers, preachers!— play upon our natural fears.....

Still that is not the main reason for our message today.

We also need to face our fears.

We cannot transcend our fears—meaning we cannot climb beyond them and essentially vanquish their effect on our thinking and our actions—if we do not face them.

Denying that our fears are turning our lives upside down won't cut it.

We do have to face them.

About 12 days ago, when I was in a crowded grocery store, I realized I did not want to go into a crowded grocery store again. I just did not feel safe. And being an adult child of an alcoholic, I believe my feelings.....are true.

Can I get an Amen from somebody? We do not dismiss our gut feelings.

A friend suggested several online order and pick up options, but when I investigated them, it turned out the stores were overwhelmed and had ended the

service. Other reports made me wonder what supplies would be left at the nearby stores....and again, I wondered if I would encounter crowds no matter when I went.

This past Tuesday, I awakened at 5:00 am.

I had just had a terrible nightmare, in which I was being interrogated by some malevolent individual.

Then the thoughts of the great rabbi Hillel came to me.

“If I am not for myself, who will be for me.

If I am only for myself, what am I?

If not now, when?”

I knew I needed to face and fortify myself against this fear right away. I quickly dressed, got in my car and took off.

I went to Sun Fresh in Westport first because it's open 24 hours. Thankfully, only a few people were there. I noticed a shopper I hadn't seen in years. We exchanged greetings from 6 feet away. He asked how the church was after being burnt down in 2011, we talked and wished each other well.

Another shopper exclaimed, “I've been through two wars and never seen anything like this. He looked at the empty paper supplies aisle. “I'm from the fifties. “ he exclaimed. “We used newspaper.”

I hurried on, obtaining only half the things needed for several causes, including our own home. It felt a little spooky in there, with lots of empty shelves, wilted veggies and wrinkled fruit, but it turned out okay.

The transgender check out lady everybody knows took a break in spraying her entire check out lane with disinfectant, and helped me untangle the little plastic bags I was nervously fumbling with.

It was 6:30 pm as I walked to the parking lot. I decided to head to Price Chopper in Brookside to try and find the other half of what I needed. They had advertised a 7-8 am seniors and compromised immunity persons hour. What a reward! It went well. There were 15-20 people shopping. No crowds. We all went around behind our carts thanking all the people working there. The store was well stocked with almost everything.

One worker led me to something I couldn't for the life of me locate.

Her effort reminded me of a Jesus saying, "Follow me."

Being given directions by someone is good. But the people who show you how to get there and they take you there! Those are your heroes!

I felt great as I drove home. Paraphrasing Pogo the Possum, I had met my enemy named FEAR—and he was definitely ME!

I had helped myself and some others.

I was quite happy and at peace.

I really do believe this Jesus following idea that "*Perfect love casts out fear*"

It works, I'm telling you!

I ALSO BELIEVE whoever it was who emerged from some fearful, fiery personal calamity and thought:

"Fear knocked at the door.

Faith answered.

No one was there."

I believe you, whoever you are.

I'm telling you, it works.

As horrifying, sad, grievous, and frightening as this hour is, this is the very hour we must make our finest hour.

You may make this hour your finest hour! Your family and friends' finest hour!

The worst turns the best to the brave!

We are all working together now in helping God in any way we can to grow in power and expand the reach of God's love.

God can't make the Kingdom of God all by God's own self.

God needs all of us—all the people—all the trees—all the birds of the air—all the flowers—the sky—grandmother moon—everyone!— to find the Kingdom of God within! Inhabit it! Share it.

Howard Thurman was a mentor to Senator Barbara Jordan and Martin Luther King at Boston University. A student once asked Thurman what he thought the world needed from him.

Thurman replied, “Don’t ask what the world needs.”

Find out what makes you come alive.

That’s what the world needs!

You and me—doing what makes us come alive!

That will be true of each of us when this is over. It is true today!

One of my wife’s friends and former medical techs is sewing masks right now. Another of her friends, from Brooklyn, called and asked her where she could find masks. Four are on the way!

The grocery check out people and the sackers are right behind the medical people in the front lines.

Next to them are the drug store workers! Child care workers. First responders!

Semi truck drivers! Garbage truck workers! Postal workers!

People helping the homeless and the homebound are there on the flanks.

Remember!—in a perilous moment in the struggle to take back Narnia from the White Witch—what Reepicheep the mouse said:

“Put me and my people at the front!”....

“Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth....”

Amen.

Rev Scott Myers, Westport Presbyterian Church, March 29, 2020