Fearless!
"Standing true in a post-truth, post-Christian society" series – principle 9
Acts 4:1-22, especially v 13!

He's Alive! (wait); He's Alive! (wait)

Today we celebrate the fact that Jesus rose bodily from the dead – He genuinely came back to life after being killed on the cross and buried in a tomb. New life in Jesus, eternal life in heaven and new resurrection bodies when Jesus returns are all connected to Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead. He died physically, but Jesus did not stay dead! On the third day, He triumphantly rose from the dead conquering death, sin & evil! Resurrection always brings a new day. For the early disciples, Peter & John, the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus brought a fearlessness into their lives where fear would have ruled before! As we read in Acts 4:13, When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished & they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

You and I can try to take life one day at a time but it is not unusual for several days to attack us at once. We can try to keep everything under control, but we will hit times where we are overwhelmed. Reading about wars around the world, hearing about the increase of violence around us and learning about the many awful acts of terrorism – any of these can naturally lead us to fear, anxiety and worry. But God gives us a special assurance in the resurrection of Jesus. Those who commit their lives to Jesus will rise again to an abundant & eternal life! He's Alive!

PROPOSITION: In a world divided by violence, terrorism, and war, we will be fearless. (Why? Because Jesus is alive! And so shall we rise again!)

I. It is easy to become fearful

Fear is a funny thing. Just this week, there was an article that claimed that great white sharks actually fear another sea creature. I have no idea how they figured that out, but when even those who are the strongest in the food chain get scared, you know fear is pretty common.

It is easy to become fearful and the causes of fear are endless. Jimmy went to a psychiatrist. "Doc," he said, "I've got trouble. Every time I get into bed, I think there's somebody under it. I get under the bed, I think there's somebody on top of it. Top, under, top, under. You gotta help me, I'm going crazy!"

"Just put yourself in my hands for two years," said the shrink. "Come to me three times a week, and I'll cure your fears."

"How much do you charge?"

"A hundred dollars per visit. Subtracting out vacations each year that will be less than $30,000 for the 2 years."

"I'll sleep on it," said Jimmy.

Six months later the doctor met Jimmy on the street. "Why didn't you ever come to see me again?" asked the psychiatrist,
"For a hundred bucks a visit, 3 times a week for 2 years? My friend cured me for $15!"
"Is that so! How?"
"He told me to cut the legs off the bed! So I paid for his dinner!"

Sometimes we miss the obvious, especially when our emotions are strong! Fear is an emotion that naturally arises when we sense danger, evil, pain or other awful things. Anxiety, dread, fearfulness, fright, horror, panic, terror, being scared and feeling trepidation - they are universal human feelings. What difference does our faith in Jesus, especially the resurrection of Jesus, make in overcoming our fears? Let’s see that in the life of Peter, one of Jesus’ top 12 disciples.

A. Actual threat of harm

Let’s start with Luke 22:31-34. This is Jesus speaking at the last supper. READ v 31. Let me stop here for just a moment - notice that every one of the disciples are going to tested by satan - “sift like wheat” here simply means they are going to be put through difficult times which will test their faith. Many translations just have the word “you” in v 31 so people WRONLY assume that it is just Peter who will be tested strongly by our spiritual enemies. But, in the original language that “you”, in v 31, is plural. Since in English, you/plural is the exact same spelling as you/singular, the NIV translation adds the words “all of” - “all of you”. They do this dynamic equivalence so you will rightly understand Jesus’ words here. It is the norm for dedicated followers of Jesus to go through hard times that can cause fear. This is not some punishment for sin.

Let’s continue. READ v 31-34. Peter sees himself as “fearless”. He thinks he is strong. But Jesus tells Peter that he will wimp out majorly three different times before the next morning. What could cause that? First fear arises when we face the threat of actual harm. READ v 47-53. Working backwards, it is night-time & dark all around. A large crowd of hundreds with swords, clubs & torches have come out of nowhere to surrounded them - this includes soldiers. According to Matthew 26:47-56, this threatening crowd then forcibly tries to capture Jesus after the kiss from the traitor Judas. That’s when Peter swings his sword and cuts off a someone’s ear. Peter & the other disciples are facing the threat of actual harm - there are hundreds against 13 & lots of weapons against their 2 swords. You can sense the adrenaline, Peter was initially ready to fight to the end. But as soon as Jesus said He wasn’t going to fight, the disciples ran away.

B. Potential of harm

Now we see the second cause of fear and that is the threat of potential harm. Peter didn’t run far, but followed the raucous crowd that had seized Jesus at a safe distance. READ v 54-57. Peter was fearless before when hundreds were attacking their small group, but now the simple words of a slave girl has Peter so frightened that he is lying and denying Jesus! Notice there is NO DIRECT THREAT. This is not a high official, an intimidating human or an armed soldier. It is a slave girl. It is not like she can beat
Peter up or personally harm him. But there was the potential that if she told others, and they told others, then someone could also arrest him like Jesus! This was not just a one-time incident. READ v 58-62. This potential of harm, led Peter to deny Jesus 3 times – not to soldiers, not to high officials, but to lowly slaves & no name people who weren’t intimidating themselves.

C. Dealing with fear

_Fear is real_ and it will arise even in the most committed & seemingly fearless people. _Fear is real_ and it will cause us to do things we don’t want to do or not do things we want to do. _Fear is real_, but fear never needs to have the last word for the Christian! We have been seeing this in action in our current sermon series which ends today. As opposition to Christians & Biblical truth arises, as societies commitment to eternal truth lowers, as conflict increases and as we face decreasing resources, - - - fear, anxiety, worry & discouragement are the normal responses. So we have been looking at 9 counter-cultural steps God gives His children so fear or anxiety don’t lead us to places we regret, like Peter. Instead, our faith calls us to seemingly unnatural responses which God takes & does far more with than we could ever think or imagine

(Potential of harm)
- So when you get frustrated with the false things society or media are training young people in, instead of complaining, we are going to put time & effort into training our young in the freedom, knowledge, and power of Christian truth
- In a world where truth is feelings-based, we will remain rooted to the Christian Scriptures and their life-giving direction.
- In a world competing for limited resources, driven by fear, unrest, & scarcity, we will remain calm, confident that our Heavenly Father provides our daily bread.

(Verbal attacks/harm)
- When we are labeled as bigots or backward, let’s be known for doing good, serving the least of these and loving our neighbors.
- When those around us believe the worst about Christianity, let’s behave like ambassadors to foreign tribes, being diplomatic towards those around us.
- When we are pre-judged, discriminated against, and even persecuted, we are invincible as we serve God’s purposes now – God has us here for a reason, and we don’t even have to figure out what it is specifically!

(Immediate threat of physical harm/injustice)
- In a world where opponents are vilified and crucified, we will love our persecutors.
- In a world where people are treated as commodities or as opponents, we will dignify all people as image bearers of God.

Now our final counter-cultural challenge to be Christian is a post-truth, post-Christian world is: In a world divided by violence, terrorism, and war, we will be fearless.
II. Early disciples fearless after being scared

Turn to Acts 4. The book of Acts is a continuation of the book of Luke, so Peter is described by the very same author in both books. Both books are written by Luke, who was from a secular background & became a follower of Jesus long after Jesus’ death, resurrection & ascension. Both books are written to someone named Theophilus. Both are the result of extensive research Luke did, most likely during the 2 years the apostle Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea. What a change we see in Peter between the book of Luke and the book of Acts. Let’s READ Acts 4:13 again. Interestingly when Peter was actually WITH Jesus for 3 years, he developed a form of fearlessness that was based on his feelings but it could NOT stand up to heavy testing. Now Jesus is in heaven and Peter has a form of fearlessness that astonishes even the highest & most antagonistic people of that day. That change didn’t come from more money, better circumstances, less problems or people being nicer to him.

A. Jailed, yet not intimidated

In Acts 3, God does a great miracle. As the disciples Peter & John were going into the temple courts, a person who was lame from birth asked them for money. They didn’t have any, instead, they prayed to Jesus and the man was healed. Needless to say if you have never walked (or haven’t walked in a while), and suddenly can - you’ll probably start doing crazy things like (“Jumping Jacks” in the temple area as you cry out “look what I can do” & “thank you Jesus!”). So the Bible tells us this previous lame man starts walking & jumping and praising God. A large crowd gathers, Peter fearlessly preaches and there is a lot of interest in Jesus. Things couldn’t be going better for Peter! Then the situation changes READ Acts 4:3. Before Peter finished his impromptu message and could give the official altar call, the temple’s head of security, the priests and the Sadducees forcibly interrupt and arrest him. Of course this doesn’t stop God at all, but Peter doesn’t know that yet READ v 4. Peter and John are jailed, Are they intimidated this time – remember this is what Peter feared might happen to him when the young slave girl identified Peter as a follower of Jesus.

READ v 13. Peter isn’t hiding – he is publicly proclaiming Jesus in the most visible, crowded places! We become fearless when we have a life-giving message for others! In a world divided by violence, terrorism, and war, we will be fearless.

B. Facing power of strong authority, yet bold

But the situation will get much worse. READ v 5-7. Talk about an overwhelming, intimidating situation. After a night in prison they are brought before many of the most powerful people in Israel at the time. These leaders have all the power, law & authority on their side. These powerful, rich, politically connected and highly educated people are demanding to know by what power or authority these country bumpkins are doing what they are doing. What a contrast. Two dirty looking, uneducated, average guys in poor clothing with chains around their hands and feet facing all this power, authority, education, exalted positions and wealth, not to mentioned the armed guards! ☺
Are they naturally going to know what to say? Have they had a lot of practice speaking before the antagonistic high and mighty? NO! But that doesn’t stop God from firing up a sense of fearlessness when absolutely nothing is going the disciples’ way! READ v 8-12. Talk about bold! *We did this in the name of Jesus Christ*

- “whom YOU crucified”. That’s bold – puts a murder blame on them!
- “But whom God raised from the dead.” Double boldness here. Not only is Peter declaring these religious leaders are on the wrong side of God, but also on the wrong side of truth. Unlike the Pharisees, the **politically powerful** Jewish leaders at this time were dominated by the Sadducees and they didn’t believe in miracles, the supernatural, evil spirits, or angels. They especially didn’t believe a miracle like the resurrection. Which is why it is easy to remember their names – they were *sad you see*! What they were interested in was power, control and wealth – they would sell their mothers out to maintain these things.

- Jesus is **“the stone you builders rejected”**. Now they are saying, Jesus is going to be the cornerstone of the great things God will do in this world!

- READ v 12. Despite all your learning, educational degrees, power, authority and wealth, you can’t even be rescued without Jesus! Peter certainly wasn’t trying to butter anyone up here! **We become fearless when we understand what is really happening in the world around us!** They aren’t in control, God is. They aren’t on the true God’s side – they don’t even know the true God or what He is & will do! In a world divided by violence, terrorism, and war, we will be fearless. READ v 13.

### C. Threatened, yet fearless

So those powerful leaders send the prisoners out and discuss the situation. After that we READ v 18-20. They are threatened, yet stand fearlessly despite having no power, special abilities or human advocates to help them! What a contrast to the impulsive, yet ineffective action of swinging a sword against hundreds of armed people. What a contrast with denying even the knowledge of Jesus before slave girls. What a contrast of hiding behind locked doors worried they would be the next arrested! When evil shouts it is the most powerful force in the world, we will remind ourselves that it isn’t! Any victory of wrong is only temporary. In a world divided by violence, terrorism, and war, we will be fearless.

### D. Trusted God & allowed Him to provide the proof (Acts 4:23-31)

#### III. The power of the resurrection

*Acts 4:2, 8, 10*

What happened between Jesus’ death and this time several months later? READ v 2. Jesus rose from the dead. **He’s Alive!** (wait). This is not some mystical, metaphysical, invisible happening. Jesus rose bodily from the dead and spent 40 days with His disciples making everything much clearer. **He’s Alive!** (wait). Peter proclaims the bodily resurrection of Jesus in every early message and answer he gives! **Jesus is alive!** (wait). Jesus then sent the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of every committed believer since! As v 8 says, “**Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit said**”. Jesus encouraged His followers that they didn’t have to
worry about what to say when they are put in these impossible, antagonistic situations – the Holy Spirit will give us the words. We don't have to worry that people may nasty things about our beliefs, or claim we are hateful, bigoted or narrow-minded! Because Jesus rose bodily from the dead! **He's Alive!** How can the resurrection be so powerful?

A. The resurrection confirms Jesus’ words – we know what is happening
   The resurrection confirms all of Jesus’ words! We don’t have to wonder if they are true, God gave us a proof that no other teacher in history has given! We know the bigger picture of what is happening around us and are not surprised by evil, warfare, conflicts and nasty people! **He’s Alive!**

B. The resurrection confirms Jesus’ power – we know how it can happen
   The resurrection confirms Jesus’ power. If He can bodily rise from the dead on the third day after being buried, His power is greater than even our imaginary superheroes! We know how the improbable & impossible can happen because we have evidence of Jesus’ power in the resurrection! **He’s Alive!**

C. The resurrection confirms Jesus’ return & heaven – we know it will surely happen
   The resurrection confirms this world is not going to last forever. Jesus is going to return and renew this planet. Physical death is not the end of our life, but we will live forever in a paradise called heaven with Jesus! **He’s Alive!**

In a world divided by violence, terrorism, and war, **we will be fearless.** Why? Because Jesus is alive! (wait).

- Jesus has opened heaven to us, because He’s alive!
- We’re going to have future powerful resurrected bodies, because He’s alive
- We are going to a place with no death, pain or sorrow, because He’s alive
- We get to pray freely to the all-powerful creator of this universe, because He’s alive
- We know that no current struggle we face will last forever, because He is alive!
- We know that God can give a new start to any life and any situation, because He is Alive!
- We know God can & will bring good from even the worst evil, because He is Alive!
- We know God loves us & will forgive our sins when we repent & believe in Jesus, because He’s Alive!

While the emotions of fear & being afraid will arise in all of us, let’s not become controlled or paralyzed by that fear. Don’t focus on what is fear inducing or uncertain but focus on the Lord, His love, His power, and His plan! Our fearlessness does NOT come from how things are on the outside – our fearlessness comes from the inside, the indwelling Holy Spirit. In a world divided by violence, terrorism, and war, **we will be fearless.** There is no better time to be reminded of this than our biggest annual celebration of the physical, bodily, resurrection of Jesus from the dead! **He’s Alive!**
Let's sing that triumphantly using hymn #232 in the song books in the chairs in front of you. Please stand and turn to #232. We are going to sing this like a choir. We will start each verse quieter, then let our voices, thoughts and expression build in the chorus!