

Last week we heard that God promises us his presence and abides with us through the Holy Spirit. There is nowhere you can go and be free from his presence. He is with you always, like a parent hovering near their child while they are learning to walk before they can run. God is there to catch you when you fall, to embrace you in his love and soothe the hurts that inevitably come as you learn to take those first steps. As I have said before, that is what our lives on earth are – our time of growth in learning to walk as Jesus did, loving and serving our Father and his purpose for this world.

Doing so requires us to exercise our faith – specifically our trust in him, since often what he would have us do is countercultural. It may not feel natural. Without trust that all will be well (will be as God plans for it to be, if only we believe and act as he calls us to...) without such trust, our action stalls. Perhaps we ignore problems that God is trying to draw our attention to, or we sit the fence, as if uncertain what we should do. Sometimes we KNOW what we should do, we just fear doing it. Our trust in God's hand in the outcome is the real problem.

We have been trained by our culture since our youth to grow in self-assurance and self-confidence. Entire books have been written on the subject. In the 70s it was *How to Take Charge of Your Life*. In the 80s we saw *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. The 90s brought us both *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* and *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus...* Making it big in the 2000s was *Who Moved My Cheese*, and last decade one of the highly recommended books on self esteem was named *You Are a Badass: How to Stop Doubting Your Greatness and Start Living an Awesome Life*. Most of these feed into human narcissism, into the idea that it's all about me: I'm the problem but I'm also the solution... But God doesn't call us to self-judgment and self-improvement. God calls us to service. God calls us to love others and to living in loving sacrifice for the sake of others. We see such an example in God's Son, Jesus Christ.

We don't need self-help books. What we desperately need is training in giving our will over to God. So many of our insecurities that keep us from acting, from walking the Way of Jesus Christ, *may* stem from our lack of self-esteem and self-assurance. But it is not ourselves that we need to be sure about. We need to be sure about God. What we often lack is the belief that God is willing to fight for us...that he will empower us to do what must be done but also that his hand is at work in ways that go largely unseen to bring about his will from our small actions. We may BE insufficient to the task, to the size of the problem, but when we are doing the will of God we are not working alone – ever. God is with us, helping his will to become a reality in this world, at this time. If you need help in getting past your own sense of insecurity or your inner voice is telling you that you are not good enough, then a book I would recommend is Brene Brown's *The Gifts of Imperfection*. God didn't create you to be perfect, but to be you, to become who he has made you to be and use the gifts he has instilled in you. And he has poured out his Spirit upon you to help you on this journey toward walking in his will.

However, we should never believe that we understand the mind of God or what exactly his larger goals are within this world in our day. What we can believe is that God is active in creation still and calling believers – calling us, both individually and as a church – to action. It is his strength that we can count upon. It is *toward his will* that we can strive, assured that God *can* and *does* use our efforts mightily toward his good. No act of kindness is too small. No time

spent with the lonely, the sick, the depressed or the dying is insignificant before their need, for God is present with us while we are present with them.

Sometimes it is we who are in need – **we** are the ones suffering greatly or living in fear. When we are the ones under attack, whether from voices within or from powers without, it can be hard to look outward or upward, to see beyond our own needs. In such times, do not be afraid to cry out to God. Do not count on your own strength to get you through, or your own plans, or on any person to save you. Here is a Word from God for you in such times; it comes from **Exodus 14:5-14** and speaks of the people of Israel after Pharaoh had finally allowed them to leave to worship God.

⁵ When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the minds of Pharaoh and his officials were changed toward the people, and they said, *“What have we done, letting Israel leave our service?”* ⁶ So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him; ⁷ he took six hundred elite chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. ⁸ The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the Israelites, who were going out boldly. ⁹ The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots, his chariot drivers and his army; they overtook them camped by the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

¹⁰ As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ They said to Moses, *“Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone so that we can serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”* ¹³ But Moses said to the people, ***“Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today, for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.”***

The Israelites were doing the will of God – leaving Egypt with Moses to journey toward the promised land. *Why did they fear?*... It is hard to see trouble coming our way and not have fear rise up within. Instead of great courage, I would say *it takes great faith*, both belief in God and great trust that **his will is for the good of his people**, as we heard previously from the prophet Jeremiah. We want everything to be smooth sailing when we follow God. But, for now, we follow God in a world that follows human leaders, and all humans are imperfect, unable to understand God. Most do not seek what is good in his eyes. So, no matter what good it is that we do, there will be those who oppose it, or who see us as weak or as overly sympathetic to others in their struggles.

There will always be those who want only their will to be done and will make trouble for anyone who gets in their way. But God is mightier than any human or any earthly force. This we know – for he is the God of creation. So let this knowledge travel from your heads to your hearts, to still the fears that rise within when trouble approaches while you follow the will of God. When we stand in his will, doing as he has called us to do, **the Lord God promises that he will fight for us**. God doesn’t say he will empower us to fight, but that we can be still... We can find peace within despite our troubles, even when we see our foes coming, approaching as on mighty chariots, threatening destruction. In those moments we can hold on to **Psalm 46:10**, *“Be still, and know*

that I am God." We can let this knowledge touch our heads and hearts, bringing peace to our spirits, no matter what threatens.

No, God does not promise us an easy road or smooth sailing on still waters when we walk the path of Jesus. He himself said in [Luke 9:23](#), "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me...*" And another time, Jesus slept peacefully while his disciples struggled against the winds and the waves as they traveled across the Sea of Galilee, intent on spreading the Good News to people on the other side. We are told in [Matthew 8:25-27](#) that they went and woke him up, saying, "*Lord, save us! We are perishing!*" ²⁶ And he said to them, "*Why are you afraid, you of little faith?*" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a dead calm. ²⁷ [And] they were amazed, saying, "*What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?*"

How could Jesus sleep peacefully when all raged around him? Because he walked the path set for him by the Father, and trusted that *whatever* happened, God's will would be done. They faced fear within because they still were following a man, not God. They did not yet know and accept in their hearts that he was truly the Son of God, and so asked "*What sort of man is this?*" Humans do not have such power – only God does. Jesus knew it was a matter of faith – without trusting that *God would fight for them*, would even fight the elements that rose against them, they were afraid. **What Jesus knew implicitly, they had yet to learn**, and so they feared while he slept as though rocked in a cradle instead of by stormy seas.

We all have much to learn about acting upon our faith, because action requires trust, which can be hard to place in *that which we cannot see, nor hear, nor touch*. Faith requires that we move beyond what the physical can tell us to a deeper way of knowing and being known. You can only achieve such faith by seeking a deeper relationship with God through prayer and study of God's Word. If we invest ourselves in this relationship, then when trouble strikes our faith strengthens us, allowing any rising fear to dissipate. It is then that we can do as Paul says in [2 Corinthians 5:7](#) and "*Walk by faith, not by sight.*" We can deny the call to trust in ourselves, in humanity, in the powers of this world...We can move forward, knowing that God's protection surrounds us.

[Ephesians 6:10-18](#) (the *Armor of God* passage) is my favorite passage from the Epistles. At a time in my life when I felt myself a victim of so much, reading this passage gave me strength to stand against my fears and walk forward in faith. Listen to what it calls us to do in times of trial:

¹⁰ **Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power;** ¹¹ put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to **stand against the wiles of the devil**, ¹² for our struggle is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore **take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on the evil day and, having prevailed against everything, to stand firm.** ¹⁴ Stand, therefore, and belt your waist with truth and put on the breastplate of righteousness ¹⁵ and lace up your sandals in preparation for the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end, **keep alert and always persevere in supplication** for all the saints.

We are protected by God's truth from all the lies of this world, which try to attach strings to our hearts. Our hearts are protected from loving what is wrong by Christ's righteousness, an invisible breastplate. You might think our feet would be better shod in *sabaton* – the name for metal plates of armor for the feet. Yet our foot armor is to be *sandals*: lightweight, for ease of travel to spread the gospel of peace. We go forth not in battle, but in peace, for the Lord our God fights for us so that we can stand in stillness within and spread our peace. Our faith is like a shield around us, keeping away the fires thrown at us by the world, intent on dislodging our peace within. Our salvation in Jesus Christ is worn as a helmet – our knowledge of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ protects our thinking from all those who would try to convince us to walk a different path, one that would take us away from our God, for we know only Christ's Way leads to God. Our only *weapons* are the Spirit, the one who makes known the Word and the will of God to our hearts – who is God's presence within us – and prayer. So, we fight by staying in conversation with God, listening to his voice, trusting in his power to save and goodness to lead.

God does not leave us exposed to evil, but provides protection through Christ, through his Word, and the Holy Spirit. In essence, this speaks God's truth, what God told Moses to say to the Israelites when threatened by Pharaoh's armies – we need only to keep still. God will do the fighting for us. That does not mean we do not take a stand, but our stand is made in the power of his might. We stand for what is *just, right, and true*, as revealed by the path walked by the Son of God. We stand in the presence of God, able to face whatever comes. And trouble always comes in this world for it has fallen victim to sin. Yet we can stand before the sinfulness of others and let God fight for what is right, living examples of what it truly means to be Christian. Our stance is to be made based in the life of Jesus Christ, showing goodness and mercy to all people, following all the words of wisdom he shared with humanity during his earthly life.

In **John 16:33** Jesus acknowledged the trouble Christians will face when we live by faith in him. He said to his followers *"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. **In the world you will have tribulation**; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."* Jesus has overcome, therefore, walking in Christ, we can stand firm. We can walk whatever path God lays before us; we can show whatever mercy he calls us to; we can give generously out of God's abundance in our lives. We can because he fights for us...and has already won the ultimate battles against sin and death. We can stand and walk and even run because of God's presence and protection for his children; we need only believe and act according to our faith.

So, do not worry about the difficulties of living faithfully as a Christian. God knows the trials and tribulations you face and is ready for them. Instead, consider what a day in your life given over to doing what God calls you to do might look like. *What has God been placing on your heart to do lately?* Is there a person who needs a visit from you? Are you spilling over with God's abundance so that you have enough and to spare and are in need of an outlet for God's generosity? Is there an injustice that you feel God asking you to address? Do not allow fear of others' reactions or your future to be part of the equation as you consider such things. Seek God's will and expect obstacles to be moved and the way made clear by God. Trust that God will fight for you as he has promised...that God's might is at work moving mountains to make his will for your actions possible. Allow yourself to be still and live by faith in God.

To our Triune God be all glory and praise, forever. Amen.