**St Martins C3 – May 29, 2022**

**Stand Strong – Avoiding Avoidance**

**Sermon Summary:**

In this series we are exploring values that God wants us to hold on tight to, that are in contrast with prevalent thinking in the culture around us.

A growing perspective in our culture that we need to be weary of is an attitude of avoidance. Often expressed in phrases like: “*I just need to escape.”* What we might be saying with a statement like that is: *“It is easier to avoid life’s challenges than face life’s challenges.”* Or: *“It is better to distract myself from the world than engage with the world around me.”*

There are a number of factors contributing to a growing avoidance culture in our society, with one of the most obvious ones being advances in technology and the internet paired with that technology giving us easy access to a whole other reality we can escape to. This doesn’t mean technology is the culprit, but rather, highlights that we can easily use it to avoid issues in our lives that we ought to be facing up to.

***What do you use to keep yourself distracted, so that you don’t have to deal with that feeling, or issue or situation that you have been avoiding?***

The reason we choose avoidance is that we are afraid of dealing with the real issue. The avoiding option seems a lot easier than overcoming the fear. Avoidance is basically seeking to distract ourselves from the fear that feels threatening to us.

The problem with the avoidance approach is that it pulls us into a downward spiral. Fear flourishes in an environment of avoidance. The more of life we avoid, the more we will fear. The more that we fear, the more restricted our lives will become.

God has called us to live expansive lives, not restricted lives. God has called us to live with faith, not fear. God can free us to live empowered lives where we influence the world around us, not fearful lives, where we hide from the world around us.This happens as we choose to listen to God’s voice of freedom, not the enemy’s voice of fear.

**Where is fear most likely to creep into your life?**

**What might you use in your life to avoid facing up to that fear?**

**Read: Philippians 4:6-7**

1. God is bigger than any fear you are facing.
2. Therefore, you can trust God enough to bring it to Him
3. God’s peace will sustain you through life’s challenges

**Read: 1 Corinthians 6:12**

Could I being using this time to do something more beneficial? Have I allowed this thing to become so important that I wouldn’t enjoy life without it? Don’t let the thing you are leaning on to escape become a controlling force in your life.

God wants us to live lives full of faith and freedom. Faith that God is in control, so we don’t need to live in fear. Faith in Him, not in the things of this world that entertain and distract us. Freedom from the distractions in this world controlling us. A life where we are allowing God’s Spirit to lead and guide us. It is only when we know that freedom for ourselves that we can lead others into that same freedom. We live in a world that so desperately needs Christ’s freedom and we can be the ministers of it.

**Suggested Questions for Connect Group Discussion:**

*Where do you see evidence of avoidance in our culture?*

*What are some of the things that people use to distract themselves?*

*What could be something you use to distract yourself?*

*Why do we choose the avoidance option?*

*What are some of the big fears that people are seeking to avoid?*

*What does Philippians 4:6-7 have to say about dealing with the fears we face?*

*What does 1 Corinthians 6:12 have to say about leaning to heavily on distractions that we use in our lives?*

*What might living in a greater level of freedom with less fear look like for you?*

**Monday’s Devotion – Get that fear into perspective**

**2 Kings 6:17**

*“And Elisha prayed, “Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”*

This week we are going to explore what happens when we bring our fears to God. In this situation, the Aramean army had surrounded the city where Elisha and his servant were. Elisha wasn’t afraid, but his servant was. Elisha wasn’t afraid, because he was looking at the situation with God’s perspective, where as his servant was afraid because he didn’t have God’s perspective. In the verse above, Elisha prays that his servant’s eyes would be opened to see the situation from God’s perspective. When this happens, the servants fear dissipates, because he is then able to see God’s deliverance.

The first benefit of bringing out fears to God, is that we gain his perspective rather than our perspective on the situation. The key thing that we will learn is that when a situation is being viewed from the perspective of fear, it will never be accurate. We will always think that it is worse than it really is. This is because the devil will use fear to encourage us to not believe what is true. God on the other hand will always lead us into what is truth. A truth that sets us free.

So, let us bring all our fears to God. As we surrender them to Him, we will discover His empowering perspective, rather than our fearful distorted thinking. Fear shrinks in the light of God’s revelation.

**Tuesday’s Devotion – Place it in God’s hands**

**1 Peter 5:6-7**

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

***Romans 8:38-39***

*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,**neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

There are some big things going on in our world at the moment, which may tempt us into living a life of fear, however, whatever these things may be in our lives, they are not bigger than God’s love for us. You are a child of God. He deeply cares about you. Even death has no power of that love. God cares for you and has overcome whatever may seeking to rob you of that security you have in Him.

With the security of that love in mind, we humble ourselves before God. We admit our weakness to believe the voice of fear rather than His voice. We cast all our anxiety on Him. After all, He is the One in control. He is the one who can be trusted. So, choose who you are trusting in today. Will you trust the One is in control and loves you beyond what you can imagine?

When we bring our fears to God, we gain His perspective, but still need to choose to place all our fears into His hands.

**Wednesday’s Devotion – The power of fear is broken**

**1 John 4:18**

*“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”*

Do you see the very clear contrast in this verse? We either live in the knowledge of God’s grace and love towards us, or we live under condemnation. It is either one or the other. With love we are made complete, which means we come into the fullness of the life that God has for us. With fear, we will live under a cloud of doubt and instability and don’t enter into all that God has for us.

This is because no fear exists in God’s presence. When we come to God we have to lay down our fears, not hold on to them. We can’t keep holding on to our fears and lay hold of all that God has for us. We either have one or the other, we can’t have both.

Here is another way to think about it. The perfect love that Jesus displayed on the cross through giving His life for us and then rising again, broke the power of fear over our lives. So, to put it bluntly, if we are still trying to hold on to our fears in God’s presence, it would be like trying to hold on to sin in God’s presence. Why would we dismiss God’s obvious salvation and deliverance?

Christ has broken the power of fear over our lives, so don’t return and live under that fear again. Live in the freedom that He has earned for you. Then you will know His perfect love and discover the fullness of life that He has for you.

**Thursday’s Devotion – Your guard and your guide**

**Philippians 4:6-7**

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

I don’t think that we have fully appreciated yet the extent and power of God’s peace in our lives. The Apostle Paul had obviously received a lot of revelation concerning the extent of God’s love, power and peace in our lives. In his prayer for the Ephesians he prayed that they would grasp these truths more deeply. Here, in his letter to those in Philippi he is outlining two important aspects of the difference that God’s peace makes:

1. **God’s peace will guard our hearts.**

What does your heart needed guarded from? Quite likely those attacks from the enemy that seek to ensnare you into thinking fearfully rather than confidently. When we bring our fears to God, His peace will be greater than the fears that we have been facing. That ought to lead us to a life where we carry His peace with us into every situation. Fear then dissipates, as God’s peace increases.

1. **God’s peace will guide us.**

Notice here that God expects us to present our requests to Him. He wants to provide for us. He wants to guide us. When we are willing to surrender ourselves, including all our fears, to Him, we will be more aware of a peace that is not only sustaining us, but also empowering us to make Christ-centred decisions.

**Friday’s Devotion – Pushing back the enemy**

**2 Timothy 1:7**

*“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.”*

The context of this letter from Paul to Timothy is fear. Timothy had been given the task of leading a church out of error and back into what was true and right. However, older members of the church, who were in error, were intimidating Timothy and opposing both his leadership and teaching. Timothy was becoming quite fearful of what these guys were going to do to him.

Paul writes to encourage Timothy to not give up. After all Timothy was the one who was anointed by God with a Spirit of power and wisdom. So, Paul encourages Timothy to not give into fear and intimidation, but to stand strong in the peace and power that come from the Holy Spirit. As Timothy does this, he will be able to put these men in their place, and, at the same time, push back the powers of Satan who are seeking to interfere with life in the Ephesian church.

In preparing for this sermon and these notes this week, I have come to appreciate again how bound many in our society are to fear. Satan is having his way in NZ and we have the answers to push back on these power of darkness and bring God’s salvation, freedom and peace. So, let’s get really good at overcoming fear and living in God’s freedom and peace, so that we in turn can minister that same freedom to those around us.