

“Facing Fear” Judges 6:1 – 28

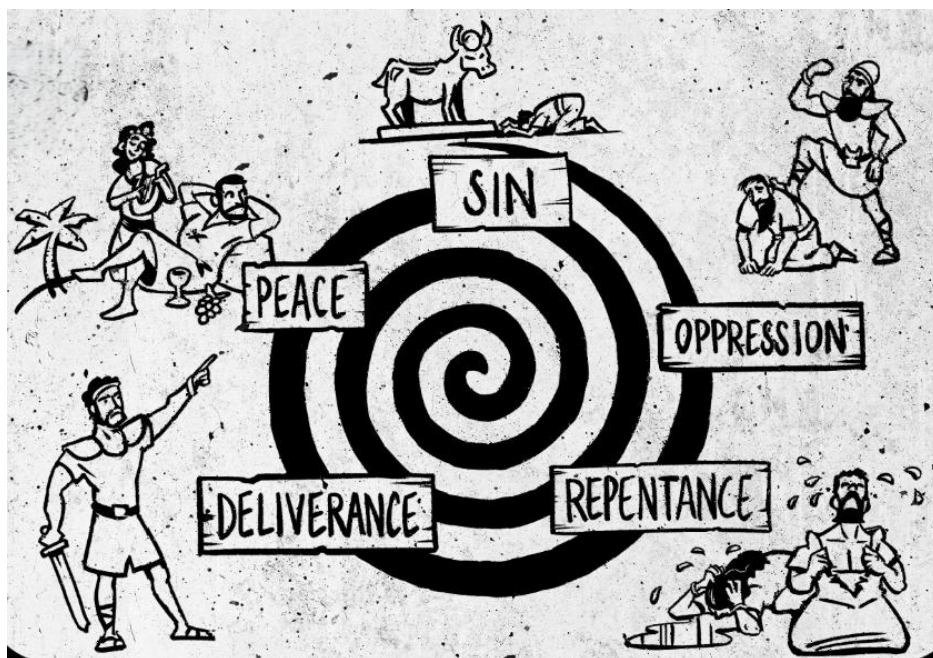
So that’s our reading this morning.

Just by way of background, the book of Judges covers the time between Israel’s liberation from slavery in Egypt to entry into and conquering of Canaan, the land of promise.

What we find in our reading this morning is that Israel is suffering under a cruel occupation... again.

I say again because throughout the book of Judges you find this repeated cycle of sin – namely idolatry and disobedience, which results in oppressive nations occupying the land to the point where the Israelites cry out to God who in turn raises up a judge – a deliverer – to rescue them.

While the judge lives there is peace in the land but after their deaths Israel falls back into its old ways and cycle is repeated.



Here the Midianites have swarmed into the land and have laid it to waste. They have so savaged the land that they have left the Israelites absolutely impoverished.

And here we meet Gideon... in a winepress... threshing wheat.

It's bizarre location so it means a number of things.
For one, somehow some crops have survived and Gideon is doing his best to hide it from the raiders in the most unlikely of places.
Two, the wider population continues to live in fear.
And possibly three, there is no grapes to make wine in the land – this is serious stuff! 😊

And in response to the people's cries, the Lord raises up Gideon.
And is Gideon's response is wholehearted, full on.... reluctance.

What characterises this part of the story is what we read in verse 27, "he was afraid..."

And that's what I felt to speak about this morning, and if you don't mind I going to share some of my story.

The reality is that everyone has fears of some kind or another.

I mean, who here has a fear of spiders?

Who here has a strong aversion to mice?

Anyone have a phobia around heights?

That's me. I don't have a head for heights. I mean I can force myself if need be but the thought of sky diving or bungee jumping actually makes me feel a bit sick.

Anyone else? What about birds?

By and large these phobias don't inhibit daily life.
We encounter them every now and then. We can take precautions.

But there are other fears that are debilitating.
They rule our lives. They paralysed us.

I don't know about you, but this is how it looked for me - my life prior to Jesus was marked, governed by fears.

I'm a naturally shy person; I don't enjoy being in the spotlight.

Standing up here is not natural for me (and some of you are thinking, “You can say that again 😊).

As a teenager I shy. I mean there’s shy, and then there’s painfully shy. I was painfully shy. I mean I hated being in the spotlight.

If a girl talked to me I’d get so embarrassed – wouldn’t know what to say. If the spotlight was on me in any social situation then I would go bright red.

But this was more than that.

Rogue uneasy feelings would often grip my heart.

I was an anxious presence most of the time.

A lot of social situations would often leave me on edge.

In fact there were times – thankfully a very few – when I would shake and an involuntary twitch would happen on my face.

School speeches were gruelling. I would go bright red whenever I became the focus of attention.

One of the particular fears was what would or did significant people in my life think of me.

As I’ve shared before, at fifteen I was bullied and got the beating of my life which left me a literal bloody mess.

I was so embarrassed and ashamed by this very public incident.

And Events like that only served to enlarge my fears.

Looking back, *those were tough days*.

Even after I became a follower of Jesus my fears didn’t simply evaporate and in some ways they intensified.

In High School self-identifying as a follower of King Jesus was scary thought. Most people at that age care about their peer’s opinions but I seemed to be especially sensitive.

What might the other students think of me? What might they say to me? What might they *do* to me?

Will I be socially ostracised? Would I be able to answer their objections and arguments?

Telling my parents who were not Christ followers that I going to be baptised was also fraught with anxiety.

I worried too about God's will for my life.

At times I was in a constant flux wondering whether I was walking in God's ways or not.

The thought of preaching was both exhilarating and terrifying in equal measure.

On one hand I heard God's call; on the other I battled against the fear of failure and looking foolish.

Even I approached the pulpit for the first time I remember my notes shaking in my hands, and after I finished speaking I almost ran off the stage.

So at this point I want to pause and ask:

"Why did the Israelites wait seven years before crying out to the Lord?"

I wonder if what they encountered could be called "thought traps".

Thought traps can rob us of the ability to step out and take risks and have faith in God.

Thought Traps

1. The Timing Trap:

"This is not the right time for this, I'll wait."

Tomorrow, next day, someday.

2. The Inspiration Trap:

"The thing is I'm just not psyched up or pumped for this."

I'm not feeling good about this. I'm not feeling the right vibe.

The first time preached, this was the thought going through my head

3. The Rationalization Trap:

This can take a lot of different forms.

"Things are not really that bad."

"Give it time and things will get better on their own."

4. The Unrealistic Expectation Trap:

"It's going to be too difficult!"

5. The Embarrassment Trap:

“I might look silly. I might come across as stupid. If I step out, I might look bad.”

For me this was the biggest of all.

Let’s be honest – which of these stands out to you?

You know often, behind each of these thought traps is actually fear.

So for me these rogue emotions morphed into thought traps, these excuses that invaded my mind.

These thoughts came into my mind to challenge the opportunities that were before me.

So here’s my question:

***“What would your advice be for someone who struggles with fear?
What would you suggest?”***

Have a chat.

So what does God do to address our fears?

What did God do to address Gideon’s fears?

Remember, Gideon’s fear coloured the outlook of his life.

He lives in fear that at any moment raiders may arrive and take away his much needed food and livestock.

Resistance seems futile because their numbers are so great.

And he and the people of Israel have lived this way for seven years. It’s become embedded in their way of thinking.

It even says he is afraid of his family and the men of his village.

Gideon meets an angel of the Lord.

The angel of the Lord is the angel represents God’s presence and through whom God speaks.

What the Lord does all throughout this passage is He attempts to assuage Gideon’s fears with His *Word*.

He calls Gideon “a mighty warrior”.

He says, “Am I not sending you?”

He declares, "I will be *with* you."

The Lord assures Gideon with the words, "Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die."

And I can relate.

For me it was about rewiring my mental traffic, so that even in the face of rogue feelings and thought traps, so that I could choose to that which was God's will and that which was right.

In meeting Jesus that meant I memorised any passage of Scripture that might in some way counteract the fear in my life and draw me closer to God.

This though wasn't some form of positive thinking – I needed them help stop my fears from overwhelming me.

Verses like "I can do all things through Christ strengthens me" (Philippians 4:19) and "God has not given us a spirit of fear but a Spirit of love, power and a sound mind." (2 Timothy 1:7) brought stability when my fears threatened to unhinge.

Like Gideon, Scripture – God's Word – became God's assurances *to me*.

So there is a place for this old practice of memorising Scripture – not as a cure-all prescription but part of the overall way of facing our fears.

The Lord also acts with supernatural power.

Gideon presents an offering to God and the angel of the Lord consumes it with fire.

We can never underestimate the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

I was fortunate to be part of a congregation where people took me and my fears seriously and were patient with me.

They prayed with me and for me asking Jesus that the wounds that had left me open to so many fears would be healed and a new courage would take its place.

And slowly but surely the life of the Spirit took up greater residence and the rogue emotions were stilled and the thought traps were broken.

Throughout those years, in amongst my fears, worries, anxieties, nervousness, lack of confidence and unease, Jesus was so good to me. He took me on.

(Now, I also don't want to suggest for a moment that we don't seek out professional help. There is very much a place for that).

There also something else: *at some point we have to act.*
We have to *do* something.

Gideon is given a task, the destruction of the altar to Baal and the Asherah pole in his home town.

Gideon acts, though imperfectly.

He doesn't do so with great boldness – He is no Moses.

The fears are there but he obeys anyway.

And that's true of all of us.

After the first time I preached I was still incredibly nervous to the point where the notes shook in my hands, and it was the same the next time, but still obeyed the call. And over time confidence in God took its place.

The first time I shared my faith with a friend at school I thought I was going to die from heart failure, and the next was a little less so.

So to finish, I think there may be three groups here this morning.

In the first group there are fears to do with a life event.

You may be fearful about health.

You could be fearful about the future.

You be fearful about children, whether young or adult.

It could be to do with employment.

Come here and be prayed for this morning or asks someone you're comfortable with to pray with you.

Let that be an act of facing your fears.

For others, is there something you need to do that the Lord has been speaking to you about for some time but you've put it on the back-burner.

It could be an action, a decision, a conversation.

And when you get down to the bottom of it, you haven't acted because of fear.

Take some face-time with God to do what you got to do.

For others it's around this aspect of being a follower of Jesus and letting others know.

Work colleagues. School friends. Neighbours.