

05/14/17 BUCYRUS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

“GET YOUR ROAR ON”

Pastor Mike Corwin

Text: 2 Timothy 1:3-11

God’s Word: Matthew 16:13-18

I - COWARDLY LION:

We've been through the Evil Witch, the Brainless Scarecrow, and the Heartless Tin Man. Today we are stopped on the yellow brick road by the Cowardly Lion. He's like the school yard bully. He has no trouble intimidating a cowering Scarecrow or a shaking Tin Man. He doesn't think twice about chasing a little dog Toto. But as Dorothy protects the dog and slaps his nose, he bursts into tears and plays the victim. Through the dialogue, we learn that he has no courage. He's afraid of everything in life.

They finally get him to stop crying and convince him to travel to the Wizard with them who should be able to give him some courage. They later arrive at the Emerald City and get their audience with the Wizard. After a song by the Lion proclaiming what he would do with the courage as he became the king of the jungle, they get their meeting with the powerful Oz. The Lion loses his false bravado and we see him run through the hall and jump out a window to find safety from his fear.

It is so easy to laugh and make fun of this hapless character except for the fact that we all have fears, don't we? We go through life. How about you...what are you afraid of? Some fear spiders, others fear snakes...some live their lives in constant fear that they will contract some dreaded disease and live on the edge watching what they eat and drink. Yet others fear planes - trains - and automobiles and refuse to travel. Or they may fear that their spouse or significant other won't be there for the long term. We fear what the government might do, or if we have enough money tucked away to retire on. We fear our jobs may not be there due to plant closure or business downsizing. We fear cats or dogs, and the list goes on and on. We all have a fear of something!

II - RELIGIOUS FEAR:

How about the fears that some have that surround their faith?

- Have I been good enough to be loved by God?
- Can God forgive me the things I've done?
- Do I know Jesus well enough to get to heaven?
- When I get there what will God say to me?
- What happens when I die?

- Does God hear my prayers?
- Am I even praying right?
- Do the people at my church like me?

Some of our religious fears aren't even about us:

- Does my child / grandchild / spouse know Jesus?
- Are my neighbors and friends right with God?
- Will the church survive or close like others around me?

And some of the fears surrounding our Christian faith is pretty scary today. In the time of the first century church, the people feared being arrested by the Romans or others and used for sport as they were fed to the lions, burned at the stake, or burned in Nero's gardens to provide light for the partiers. Today we worry about such things like being blown up by a suicide bomber because they don't agree with our religious beliefs. Planes have been blown up in the sky or have been flown into skyscrapers, bombs exploded at marathon races, people purposefully ran over by semis all in the name of people's God or gods.

Ever since 9-11, we have been in a religious war - first with the Taliban and now with ISIS as we watch people murdered and beheaded because we don't believe as they do. We haven't really made much progress since Rome have we?

Soooooo, what are we supposed to do?

III - HAVE COURAGE:

We are supposed to have courage. We are supposed to be soldiers of the cross who stand up to the forces of darkness. Who fight against evil and shine the light of Jesus into the lives of those who are consumed by the darkness.

The Scripture you heard read earlier this morning from the book of Matthew gives us that message. It is a familiar Scripture that tells us about Jesus walking with his disciples one day. He had heard the people rumbling about who he was and this day he asked his disciples who the people were saying he was. They said that some were saying he was the beheaded John the Baptist come back from the grave, or the great prophet Elijah or Jeremiah sent back to work for God again. And Jesus turned it on them and said, "So who do you say that I am?" And Peter said "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." This evoked the line that most can retell that Peter was the rock upon which Jesus would build his church and that "all the powers of hell will not conquer it." Or as some of you memorized it from the old translations "And even the gates of hell cannot prevail."

We have set back for years and claimed this as a promise from Jesus that the church can never cease to exist. That the church is safe from the powers of darkness. It's that interpretation that has caused us to hunker down inside our wonderful stone castles, pull up the drawbridges, and hide inside where we think we have "Sanctuary." But that's not what it means. This verse isn't about a defensive mentality...it's about an offensive one. It means that we should be out in the

darkness, carrying the light of Jesus to the world. It means that we should be pressing the fight all the way to the gates of hell and we should be destroying even them! They cannot withstand the attack of the Church of Jesus Christ. It means that the church is not supposed to be running away from the darkness but running towards it because we are the only ones who have the weapon to defeat it. The forces of hell attack the church because we do not attack them. Open the doors and tear down the gates!

IV - TEXT:

But Pastor Mike, how do we do that? Have you seen it out there? It's dark and it's scary. How are we supposed to fight what's out there? How are we supposed to overcome the darkness and tear down the gates of hell? You sending us out to do that is like us sending you to Wal-Mart!

I find the answer in Scriptures like this one that the Apostle Paul wrote to the young pastor Timothy...

2 Timothy 1:3-11 (NLT)

³Timothy, I thank God for you—the God I serve with a clear conscience, just as my ancestors did. Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. ⁴I long to see you again, for I remember your tears as we parted. And I will be filled with joy when we are together again. ⁵I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you. ⁶This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. ⁷For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. ⁸So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don't be ashamed of me, either, even though I'm in prison for him. With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the Good News. ⁹For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus. ¹⁰And now he has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of Christ Jesus, our Savior. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News. ¹¹And God chose me to be a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of this Good News.

This Scripture gives me the answer to HOW. Paul is in prison in Rome, being held by the Emperor Nero. He is facing certain death, and yet he hasn't stopped working. He even says that he continues to serve partly because of the religious lessons he learned from his ancestors. He has not stopped spreading the light as he writes this letter to the young pastor Timothy.

He tells him that he thanks God for Timothy's existence and calling, that he does it continually. He says he has an intense desire to see him again and remembers the tearful goodbye they had shared when he last left and he looks forward to the reunion which will fill him with joy. Paul was a soldier of the cross and yet it's in passages such as this one that we see he also had a tender heart. You can see his humanity.

He tells Timothy that he knows his faith is genuine, that he's not just putting on an act. His grandmother and mother had passed the faith to him and he wasn't just playing Christian. He was one.

But he does remind him that his faith can grow weak, just like ours, if he doesn't keep it going. He uses the image of a fire, which if not stirred or fed with more wood will go out eventually. He's been called to God's service, Paul was there when it happened, and he has to keep his strong faith going and put it into practice.

He even remembers that Timothy was a little timid and tells him that God did not put a spirit of fear and timidity (some versions say cowardice) in him, but had given him a spirit of power...love...and self discipline. He goes on to strengthen his courage by admonishing him to never be afraid of doing the work of Jesus or of supporting those others who were too like Paul in prison.

He concludes by telling him that God called him to do the work, that it was God's plan to send his grace to us through Jesus. That Jesus died to defeat sin and death and when he did so he shined the light on a way of life which will keep us out of the darkness.

Jesus was brave enough to carry out the plan God had laid before him and because of that we can have eternal life. We are called to be brave enough to spread that Good News to others! He has chosen us just as he chose Paul.

V - GET YOUR ROAR ON:

We have identified the darkness. We have identified the light. It's our job to shine that light into the darkness. Our source of courage is the same one noted by Paul. The Holy Spirit gives us the power, the love, and the self discipline needed to be brave in the face of evil. The power of Jesus goes with us as we shine his light into the battle. The church needs to stop running away in fear like the Cowardly Lion. It needs to find its courage and press the attack. It needs to remember what the Scriptures say about "GREATER IS HE WHO IS IN ME, THAN HE WHO IS IN THE WORLD." Which means we do not have to be afraid. The moment we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior we are given the Holy Spirit whose power is greater than anything this world can bring against us. That means we don't have to be afraid! When I am doing the work of the church...when I have my "Jesus on" I also have my "Jesus in." It means that we have the power of Jesus with us, the Light of the World to defeat the darkness, the Armor of God to wear into the battle, and the promise we can even tear down the gates of hell if we press the battle.

We don't have to wait until the end time to see heaven defeat hell, we should be doing it now. It's time to "GET YOUR ROAR ON!"

AMEN