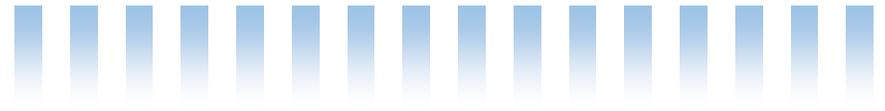


Fearless Faith



FIRST ENGLISH LUTHERAN CHURCH SMALL GROUP MINISTRIES

He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The Great Commandment: *Matthew 22:37-39*

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The Great Commission: *Matthew 28:18-20*

These two passages from Matthew are the guides for small group ministries in churches all over the United States and for our small groups here at First English also. By making deep connections with God and with others we are challenged to live out the Great Commission and the Great Commandment in our everyday lives.

We're glad that you are participating in our small groups. Take time to write down the names and contact information of those in your group. If dangerous weather or other emergencies make meeting impossible, you will have a way to connect with one another. Also, take time to pray for those in your small group every day.

*Even though I walk through
the darkest valley, I fear no evil;
for you are with me*



FEARLESS FAITH

You're on your way to a meeting when you realize that you forgot your lunch at home. You're hoping your meeting doesn't go late, because you still need to get groceries before heading to the school to pick up your daughter from volleyball practice. In addition, you're feeling guilty because you haven't been able to visit your mom for a few weeks - and you're not sure when you will find time for it. You are exhausted thinking about all the things you have to do.

You are like so many of us in the 21st century. You have so many things competing for your attention, that on any given day you are afraid of failing to remember something really important. How do you deal with the chaos?

In addition to those day to day worries, there are larger fears that we deal with consistently. We are afraid of losing connections or unable to establish friendships. We live in the fear of being alone; we live in fear of failure; and we live in fear of suffering. How are we supposed to deal with these basic fears?

This sermon series, *Fearless Faith*, is meant to give all of us tools to deal with the fears and frustrations that are part of everyday life.



WEEK 1: FEARLESS FAITH

Listening to Act for the Good

VIDEO NOTES: Sermon Section 1

In his book, *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*, Soren Kierkegaard suggests that one of the main sources of stress and unhappiness (we would add anxiety) is our double-mindedness. Competing priorities make us anxious, constantly unsure if we are doing enough or doing what we should. One of the symptoms of this double-mindedness is the way that we listen to one another. We listen to evaluate. Kierkegaard calls us to be earnest in our listening. Instead of listening to judge, we must listen to act for the good. In every conversation, with friends or adversaries, children or adults, we listen for the kernel of good that we can act upon.

QUESTIONS

What are some symptoms of our double-minded society?

What are the everyday activities that cause you the most stress?

What makes someone "earnest"? What do you think of Kierkegaard's definition that earnestness is "listening in order to act"?

VIDEO NOTES: Sermon Section 2

Our doublemindedness also becomes apparent when our actions are done to impress others. Instead we are called to act before an Audience of One - a God who loves us. Since our value no longer depends on doing the most successful thing, we are free in our ability to do the right thing.

QUESTIONS

What is most freeing about living your life before an Audience of One?

Do you prefer to think of living your life before God or before the standard of goodness?

How do we value the opinions of others if we are living before an Audience of One?

SCRIPTURE CONNECTION

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." John 2:1-5

The servants listen to Jesus and act, and the plain water turns into amazing wine. Jesus can make our everyday offerings do amazing things also. Discuss the everyday actions of others that have touched your life.



WEEK 2: FEARLESS FAITH

What is the Good?

VIDEO NOTES: Sermon Section 1

The Scripture reading for today has sometimes been called Jesus' mission statement. The remaining three years of his life are committed to fulfilling it. It's noteworthy that Jesus reveals no double-mindedness. He is unconcerned about boosting his ego, impressing others, earning rewards or avoiding punishment. Jesus knows whose eyes are fixed on him. He wills and does the Good - not for his family, not for those listening to him in the synagogue - but for his heavenly Father. That's all that matters.

QUESTIONS

Share a time you have felt like this: "Living for Him. Playing for Him. Giving Him all the glory."

What personal challenges get in the way of our doing or willing the Good with single-minded resolve?

What does it mean to be taken "beyond yourself"? What would it feel like for you?

VIDEO NOTES: Sermon Section 2

The Good begins and ends with God. It takes you beyond yourself. It brings out the best in you. It is something which makes you glad it happens even if it never happens through you. The Good is something to which a person is compelled to do with single-minded resolve. And, it is different for each person. The Good to which God calls each of us is revealed through recurring themes in our lives, a heart that leaps, discontent with a certain injustice, inspiration from Jesus' life, a neighbor's need, and more.

QUESTIONS

What is your piece of the Good that God has revealed to you?

In what ways has God revealed the Good to you over your lifetime?

What, if anything, do our various pieces of the Good have in common?

SCRIPTURE CONNECTION

[Jesus] unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Luke 4:18-19

Jesus' single-minded resolve is evidenced later in the 4th chapter of Luke. Though the townspeople threaten to hurl him off a cliff, he passes through the midst of them and goes on his way. Think of a similar time that you've bucked "the crowd" and went on your way, intent to carry out your mission, because you knew it was right and good.



WEEK 3: FEARLESS FAITH

The Fear of Loneliness

VIDEO NOTES: Sermon Section 1

We have a deep-seated need to be part of a group. Fear of isolation can result in a chaotic and overly busy schedule, a willingness to abandon values in order to stay in a group, or a mercenary attitude that ranks the ability of groups to raise our social status. Our fear of loneliness can prompt us to stay in unhealthy relationships, to allow others to control our behavior, or use others as a way to fulfill our own needs. These fears can make us believe that we are worthless and prevent us from hearing God's voice.

QUESTIONS

How does being busy affect your everyday life? How does it keep you from being single-minded in your pursuit of the Good?

Have you ever been tempted to compromise your morals to be part of a certain crowd? How do you deal with that pressure?

People can "abandon" a friend because they find more prestige or security with a different group or individual. How do you respond if you see this happen? What if it happens to you?

VIDEO NOTES: Sermon Section 2

The fear of being lonely can cause us to listen to many negative voices. Culture says that our connections give us our value. Defeat says we are powerless to overcome loneliness. Escape says that someone else can make us happy. Most harmful, the voice of inferiority tells us that we are not worthy of being known. Instead of falling prey to these influences, we use time alone to listen to the voice of God. God's voice never shames or speaks words of self-harm. We can acknowledge loneliness without running to the crowd where God's voice and our identity can be lost. God has a purpose for each of us - one that is for our good and the good of the world.

QUESTIONS

When dealing with harmful voices, which of the voices are you most likely to listen to? Culture? Defeatism? Escape?

Why is it important not to run to the crowd when we are trying to deal with the fear of loneliness?

What are strategies that help you hear God's voice?

SCRIPTURE CONNECTION

There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. Luke 4:27-28

Those in the synagogue are filled with rage because Jesus has questioned whether the Israelites are truly chosen and preferred by God. They are basically saying, "Who do you think you are, to question our identity as God's chosen people?" Religious disagreements can still cause some of the most cruel and/or bitter arguments. Why do you think that is the case?



WEEK 4: FEARLESS FAITH

The Fear of Failure

VIDEO NOTES: Sermon Section 1

The phrase "if at first you don't succeed, try, try again" is traced back to the 19th century educator Thomas Palmer. While it and the other phrase "failure is not an option" have motivated many people, they do nothing to calm our inner anxieties and fears. It's as if we make success an idol. We think success will demonstrate we have what it takes. Success will prove we have worth. Jesus, however, simply says, "Do not be afraid. Follow me."

QUESTIONS

"We worship success." Share examples of how this statement speaks the truth. Is it a problem for Americans only, or for all people everywhere?

Describe a time when a fear of not succeeding prevented you from even trying.

Where is the voice of Jesus leading you and you're afraid to follow?

VIDEO NOTES: Sermon Section 2

Fearless faith moves us ever forward in seeking the Good, even when there is no hope or intention of success. Fearless faith is founded on the belief that we are part of something bigger . . . part of God's future. Practicalities are less important than faithfulness. Promises of success are less important too. We are on a mission from God; knowing this frees us from our fears and worries.

QUESTIONS

Aside from Mother Teresa and Dr. Farmer, who else exemplifies seeking "the Good," with no hope or intention of success?

Share a glimpse of God's future that inspires you . . . that "gets under your skin."

What frightens you, if anything, and keeps you from embracing that future now?

SCRIPTURE CONNECTION

When [Jesus] had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. Luke 5:4-6

The Bible offers us many glimpses into God's future for us and the world. What are some of your favorites?



WEEK 5: FEARLESS FAITH

The Fear of Suffering

VIDEO NOTES: Sermon Section 1

Although we experience times of chaos and disappointment in life, we don't fear those minor setbacks, having various coping mechanisms to deal with them. In contrast, besides pain, true suffering has three attributes: we do not choose it, it does not help anyone else, and in fact, it inconveniences or elicits pity from others. In that suffering, we have a wish - the wish is to get better! How we deal with our understanding of suffering relates to how we deal with this wish. We are tempted to scab over the pain of this wish with positive thinking, pretending our suffering doesn't matter, giving false platitudes, or ignoring the pain with busyness. Instead, we are called to live in awareness of that wish.

QUESTIONS

What do you think of this definition of true suffering? Does it leave anything out?

In the gospel, Jesus says the poor, hungry, weeping, and those who are hated, excluded, and reviled are blessed. How can that be true?

How are you most tempted to try to scab over the pain of suffering?

VIDEO NOTES: Sermon Section 2

We have no choice about suffering, but we can choose how we deal with suffering. For all people, our one purpose is a single-minded commitment to the Good - to God. Those who suffer are perhaps more able to step into this alternate world of eternal values. Instead of trying to escape suffering with pursuit of a perfect life, we are called to swing free from earthly fears. In our suffering, we listen to act for the Good before our Audience of One.

QUESTIONS

Describe times you have felt the need to step into the alternate world of eternal values. How do you access that world when not in pain?

We are bound by the false hope that we can create a perfect life free from suffering. How do we clip the cords of control and swing free?

One of the most common question about suffering is “Why did God allow this to happen to my loved one?” How do you answer that question?

SCRIPTURE CONNECTION

In Acts 5, Peter and the apostles are arrested and brought before the council as a repeat offense. After being threatened with death, the apostles are flogged, released and told to preach no more. It says in the Bible, *they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.* (v. 41) We might be tempted to give the meager consolation of false platitudes to those who suffer (such as “Don’t worry, everything will be alright.”) Instead, we can step into that eternal world and give the full consolation of working for God and the good, no matter how much we suffer. How are we able to listen and act for the good, even when in personal pain?



WEEK 6: FEARLESS FAITH

Willing One Thing

VIDEO NOTES: Sermon Section 1

Since seeking the Good can be likened to being on a stage for an Audience of One, we can be certain God will cue us when we forget our lines. One source of cues from God is the Bible. For instance, Luke 6 charges us to love our enemies, to judge not, and to forgive. Our double-mindedness may lead us to ignore these cues and make up our own lines, in order to please the audience of the world. But God calls us to take God’s cues and seek the Good with single-minded resolve . . . whether others applaud or boo us.

QUESTIONS

What do you think about the claim that the scripture from Luke 6 is a “prompt” from our Audience of One?

What is “the Good” that Matthew Shepherd’s mother manifests?

Knowing that you are performing for an Audience of One rather than an audience of the world, what will you do differently in the next many days?

VIDEO NOTES: Sermon Section 2

To will one thing is to will what is of eternal value, and thereby, it is to be our primary focus. There are other worthy goals for our lives, but to pursue any of them single-mindedly can be self-defeating and contradictory. By God's grace, these goals and pursuits fall into place when we will the one thing to which God calls us.

QUESTIONS

What feelings surface when it's said that "to will one thing" excludes Work, Family, and Ease and Comfort as primary foci of our lives?

How good are you at listening to "the One who is one thing and who is all"?

Kierkegaard titled his book: *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*. Do you think this is what Jesus meant when he said, "Blessed are the pure in heart"?

SCRIPTURE CONNECTION

"But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. . . . Do not judge, and you will not be judged. . . ." Luke 6:27-38

There are many ways to assess whether something is a cue from our Audience of One. It may be a peace that comes upon us. Another is, as in above, an awareness that the prompt is different than what you'd hear from the world's voices. What are other ways you can discern what is God's voice?