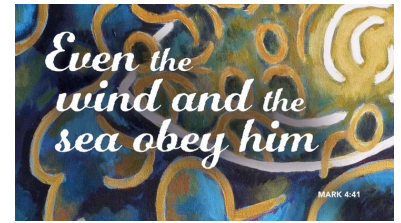


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 1 Samuel 16:1-13



“Facing the Future”

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from Almighty God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I think in today’s world we can’t talk about facing the future without seeing how the emotion of fear plays into it. In fact, it’s probably part of our daily lives. Of course, fear is useful, but it can become controlling.

On my almost daily walks, I have to routinely cross Highway 32/57, often busy with north/south traffic. Why do I look both directions, gauging the speed and distance of traffic before I cross? My future could be at risk.

What might happen to my future crossings if the news media began to report pedestrian fatalities on the highway, traffic going way passed the speed as they approach or leave the Heritage Road traffic circle? Or if there were social media postings that motorcycles gangs from Wrightstown were driving north to prey on unsuspecting senior adult walkers?

What about my future crossings of the highway? Should I just abandon them and stick to the cul de sacs around my house? How might fear begin to shape my exercising future?

What about the past 18 months? How much has fear, responsibly and irresponsibly, played into our future? Listen to politicians and commentators today and see how often fear is not always an attempt to be informative, but a weapon used to drum up support or self promotion. Some fears are justified; some are pronounced to create a sense of dependency.

If one is even a casual reader of history, she/he would find fear about the future popping up in every generation. The huge difference today is that technology and social media makes everything seem more imminent, more immediate and, therefore, amplified

How do we face the future when fear is pronounced, almost surrounding us daily? Let’s take a look at some things from the written Word of God, through this story from Samuel. Can it give us some thoughts about facing the future and how we might deal with it?

The first thing is that God is not above correcting past decisions. In other words, just because something was decided in the past or is moving in a certain direction doesn’t mean the future is set in concrete. Facing the future with our fears we need to remember that God is always seeking to direct things.

If you flip back a few chapters in 1 Samuel, God told Samuel that Saul was the man to become the first king of Israel and directed the prophet to anoint him as king for the future. That decision soon went sour...so much so that the Lord communicates to Samuel, “I am grieved that I have made Saul king because he has turned away from me.” We are then told that Samuel was so troubled by this that he cried out to the Lord all that night.

What happened? The future that Samuel and the Israelites anticipated was disintegrating, a future in which God was involved.

Sometimes we become so convinced about how the Lord is leading us: we do what is expected, we walk along the right paths, and things seem to be unfolding just like we thought...and then, "Boom!" things start disintegrating. "But Lord, I was doing it all the way I thought you told me to!" And fear creeps into our lives.

There are at least three directions we can go at this point:

We can try to make corrections by the sheer force of the human spirit, **or** we can get ticked off at God and walk away from Him, **or** we can come to terms that the Lord is going to direct us in a different way.

The simple lesson from this story is that God is not above correcting past decisions...our own and even His...to get us where we should be. We should not feel that the Lord has thrown in the towel.

The Lord gives human beings the ability to make decisions and our decisions can alter how God responds. Saul simply went off the tracks and the Lord responded accordingly.

Facing the future means being ready to have God shift direction or open up other avenues. It means our being able to understand, if necessary, that what we thought was the Godly direction just got a new pathway put on the map. We need not be paralyzed by fear; we can be assured that the Lord is continually working on things. We need to be open to that.

A second thing to remember facing the future is that it will demand courage. Samuel is questioned by God, "How long will you mourn for Saul"... the future that didn't work out as originally planned?

Samuel is informed that a new king has been chosen and that he is to go see Jesse of Bethlehem. Did you notice Samuel's response? He's not so sure that will be a safe thing to do: Saul will kill me! It takes courage to walk into the future. That courage comes from keeping the Lord clearly in focus.

God tells Samuel to say to Jesse, "Peaceably, I have come to sacrifice to the Lord." In other words, come to worship; come to that place where one's attention, one's focus is to be upon the Lord.

We cannot face the future without courage, and we cannot have the necessary courage if our focus is wandering all over the landscape of human self-help rather than first directed on the Lord himself.

In 1983, Carol and I were privileged to lead about ten young adults to an international conference in Switzerland. About a dozen countries were represented. There were several Christian young adults, who came from countries that were from behind the Iron Curtain. The communist governments controlled their lives so rigidly that they were not told they could attend until a day or two before the beginning of the conference.

At the closing worship service, an East German young woman rose and shared, with tears streaming down her cheeks, that being together for worship gave her fresh courage to return home. I don't think she or any of us could possibly fathom the future she was facing, but we rejoiced that the Lord would be present and acknowledged in it all.

This was the same person who told me that when she left for the conference her pastor-father asked her, "Will you be coming back?" knowing that the conference might be the opportunity for her to defect to the West and a free future. Can you imagine any parent having to say that to his/her child?

It takes courage to walk into the future...and a way to be encouraged, supported, and receive courage is to focus with others on the Lord. That is one thing which worship is intended to do. That is why God directed Samuel to worship with Jesse and his sons: to keep focus on the Lord for the future. Each Sunday, we should walk from this sanctuary with courage to face the future.

Lastly, a thing to remember to face the future is to see things as God sees them.

When Jesse and his sons arrive to worship, Samuel sees Eliab and thinks that he is the one to be anointed. Evidently, he presented a rather striking physical image to Samuel.

The word of the Lord to Samuel needs to ring true for us, "The Lord does not look at the things humans look at...the Lord looks at the heart."

So the sons of Jesse parade before Samuel without a decision being made. The Lord knows what one needs for the future.

Facing the future without fear is seeing things as God sees them: be ready for the unexpected.

The future for the Hebrew people shows up in the youngest son of Jesse, David, who had been assigned to the most menial, boring task in the family pecking order. The least expected, the one who was almost overlooked, the one who was least seasoned with life-experience...this is the one who was to be leading people into the future. Be ready for the unexpected.

Certainly, David would have his own challenges with the Lord...his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and arranged murder of her husband, at times his disintegrating family life, his being told he couldn't build the temple of the Lord because he was a man of war, having too much blood on his hands.

The face of the future is about the heart that always is willing to come to the Lord. But we must be ready for the unexpected, to know that what the Lord has in mind does not necessarily line up with our own agendas.

There the disciples sat in a boat, a storm raging over the waters, and Jesus asleep in the stern, a rather bizarre picture! "Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing?" came their cry. In other words, "Our future is about to drown and you are sleeping!" Have you ever felt that way about the Lord and the future?

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith? Jesus is God's face for the future. Keep Him before you and no matter what happens, how things might change, the courage that is needed, seeing things as God sees them, Jesus will take us where we need to be. "Peace! Be still!" AMEN.