

# SERMON DELIVERED AT AUBURN UMC, AUBURN, MICHIGAN

25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Year C

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Text: Isaiah 41:2-10

Title: “Moving Out of Scare City: Around Every Corner”

I read a headline the other day that went something like this: “Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton both predict disaster if the other wins”. It is so very clear that there is a lot of fear out there keeping us all stirred up--all the “what if’s” when leadership changes as it inevitably will. Just the fact that I mention the election at all probably raises anxieties in the room. Please rest easy, I’m not preaching about politics this morning and will not be endorsing any particular candidate. That’s not what we are here for.

I am, however, led to address the proliferation of fear, people using fear to promote a message. And of course, it’s not just the election cycle that tries to convince us all that the sky is falling, as the old Chicken Little story has it. Even religious leaders use fear to promote a message.

As a child I can remember being afraid in the middle of the night when awakened by noises that sounded like a bomb went off somewhere. I remember wondering if I was left behind. I remember being afraid that I might not have made it on God’s salvation list, that the apocalypse had come and though I was a good church goer, maybe I hadn’t made it. Such are the thoughts of children when adults focus on fear as a tool to enforce what some call faith.

We are bombarded by messages of fear. Fear around every corner. Fear of unemployment. Fear of a crashing economy. Fear of the twisted theology of terrorists of any religious expression. Fear of the new kid on the block. Fear of failing. Fears, lots of fears.

As people who seek the peace of God that passes all understanding, how are we to live in the midst of all the fears expressed in the voices of people all around? How can we move ourselves out of the kind of scare city of the fear full?

The truth is, of course, that fear has always been a part of the human experience. Since the time of Adam and Eve when God walked the garden and found them hiding because they were afraid, fear has been part and parcel of what it means to be a human being.

Throughout the biblical story of God’s interaction with the people of Israel, God is often in a position to calm fears. To Abram, Jacob, Joseph and Moses, the great patriarchs, when they faced situations that led them to shake in their boots, God told them “Do not be afraid. I am with you.”

As the nation of Israel takes shape, their history is made through repeated threats of

invasion and conquest from neighboring super powers. Prophets like Isaiah were called to service by God to guide and direct them as they proclaimed God's word for the people. This morning we heard a passage that describes a "victor from the east" being roused. Scholars suggest it is a reference to Cyrus of Persia. Cyrus was the ruler of Persia during the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. He has been called the "father of the Iranian nation". His conquest of neighboring nations was motivated primarily in order to gain power over the Mediterranean coast. (<http://www.cyrusthegreat.net/>).

That tiny nation of Israel lay in the path of Cyrus's great power. And so--as you might imagine--to be aware that Cyrus was coming was not very comforting to the people of Israel.

In this context the prophet reminds them that God...:

...delivers up nations ...,  
and tramples kings under foot;  
he makes them like dust with his sword,  
like driven stubble with his bow.  
<sup>3</sup> He pursues them and passes on safely,  
scarcely touching the path with his feet.  
<sup>4</sup> Who has performed and done this,  
calling the generations from the beginning?  
I, the LORD, am first,  
and will be with the last.

Isaiah reminds them that the power of God supersedes any superpower. The power of the creator of the universe exceeds any earthly ruler; any would be leader of a superpower. Isaiah reminds the people and their leaders that God is first.

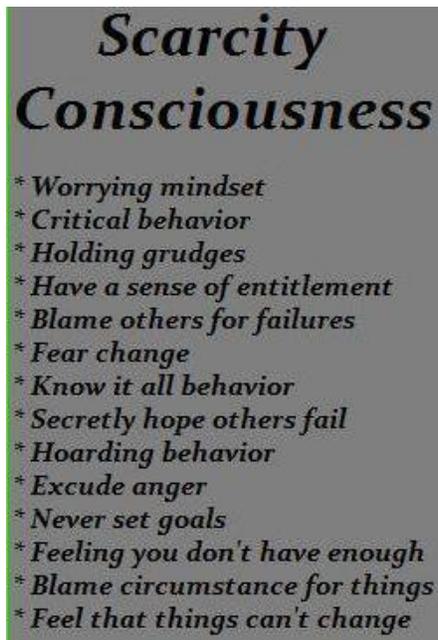
Yet, God has a special attachment to this people. Not only is God to be differentiated from powerful rulers—the power of God is beyond them all—but God cares for the people. Isaiah reminds them that because God has a history with these people that they can trust God to give them what they need:

"You are my servant, [says God]  
I have chosen you and not cast you off";  
<sup>10</sup> do not fear, for I am with you,  
do not be afraid, for I am your God;  
I will strengthen you, I will help you,  
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

Even when faced with geopolitical forces that threaten change, God says "do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand." Of course, the question then comes: "Do they trust God's word?"

There can be no doubt that we live in tumultuous times ourselves. Like the Israelites, we are affected by geopolitical forces, except that we happen to live as citizens of the world's current superpower rather than feeling threatened by one. Still, we face fears. We still face the

kind of fear that tells us we do not have enough. Even in this great country of ours. Even with the kind of abundance we enjoy in this country in this age, we suffer from the fear of scarcity. Theologians call it the “Theology of Scarcity”. It’s based on the perception that none of us have enough and that there just isn’t enough to go around. We have a slide that describes the kinds of characteristics involved in a scarcity consciousness.



Scarcity consciousness is based in fear. Sometimes I suspect we find ourselves suffering from this kind of fear as a result of personal pain we’ve experienced that makes it harder to trust God’s word:

<sup>10</sup> do not fear, for I am with you,  
do not be afraid, for I am your God;  
I will strengthen you, I will help you,  
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

Consider, though, another way of thinking, another way of being in the world. What if we always and everywhere trusted God’s word not to fear? What would that look like, feel like, be like? What if we trusted that we would always have what we need, that when we trust in the power and grace of God, we would be strengthened and sustained in such a way that we need not worry about what lies ahead? Consider these characteristics of abundance consciousness. When we live with an abundance consciousness, we have...

# Abundance Consciousness

- \* *Attitude of gratitude*
- \* *Receive graciously*
- \* *Give willingly*
- \* *Want others to succeed*
- \* *Set goals*
- \* *Take inspired action*
- \* *Develop life plans*
- \* *Exude happiness and joy*
- \* *Embrace change*
- \* *Continuously learn and grow*
- \* *Forgive past mistakes & others*
- \* *Allow positive energy to flow*
- \* *Think positive thoughts*
- \* *Express positive ideas*

<sup>10</sup> do not fear, for I am with you,  
do not be afraid, for I am your God;  
I will strengthen you, I will help you,  
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

About 1,000 years after Isaiah proclaimed God's word to trust God and not fear, Martin Rinkart was born in what is now Germany. Most of his professional life as a parish priest was spent during the 30 Years War in Europe. It was—as wars are—a devastating violence. The town in which he was serving, Eilenberg, was a walled town and it became a refuge for fugitives from all around. It was seriously overcrowded as a result. Resources were few. Hunger and starvation experienced by most. In these conditions, an epidemic resulted in the death of his first wife and the only other clergy in the area. Rinkart alone was left to preside over the funerals of some 40 to 50 people a day. In all over 4,480 people. So many were dying so quickly that refugees had to be buried in trenches without a service. Throughout the whole epidemic some 8,000 persons died. Not only was he presiding over the services of so many who had fallen ill but he also found himself in the unwanted position to negotiate with the invading armies who sought quarters there, acquisitioned their food, their homes and even their money. Once the peace finally did come one writer described him as “a worn-out and prematurely aged man.”

And yet, Rinkart--in spite of all the suffering he witnessed and endured himself, managed to write one of our most loved hymns of thanksgiving. It's #102 in the hymnals. The 30 Years War would not end for another 12 years and still was able to write:

*O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us  
With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us.  
And keep us still in grace, and guide us when perplexed,  
And free us from all ills, in this world and the next.*

That is an abundance consciousness, my friends! Trusting that God will provide, that there is enough and more even in the midst of suffering. It's all a matter of trusting God when it seems around every corner there is something or someone to fear; trusting that we will have enough, that you will have enough.

So as we sing this hymn together, will you trust God with your fears? Will you shift from a scarcity consciousness to an abundance consciousness?

Let's sing together.