

## ***Giving in to Fear***

Trinity CRC, December 8, 2019 AM

Advent series: **Feeling the Wait**

**1 Samuel 13:1-14 (v.14)**

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Friends in Christ,

My mom came from a family of 8 girls. Her mom died when my mom was 12. When she and her sisters were dating back in the 1940s mostly, her dad allowed the girls to go out with the boys until 10pm. Then the girls had to be in the house. And the boyfriends were allowed in as well. My Opa would let each couple have a corner in the livingroom. Then he'd turn off the light for an hour so each couple could have a little privacy. That's kind of comical to my ears. But it was a different day. I think my Opa was trying to walk the line between helping young couples have some privacy while heeding God's call for holiness or pure living.

I remember a conversation with my dad back in the day when I was dating Patsy. My parents didn't talk a lot about premarital sex but they got the message across. Patsy and I dated long-distance and therefore would spend 2 or 3 weeks together every 4 months, living under our parents' roof. As my relationship with Patsy grew stronger, Dad said something I can still hear. "Be careful when you're together so much. I was young once too and I know the temptation!" Those were good words from my dad. I appreciate them more today than ever.

The concern of my Opa and my Dad was the same: Reminding young couples that our sexual desires are fine and good. But there are times when God says, "Wait" and we must learn to trust his ways.

Sometimes we don't do what God says because we are afraid of saying "No". Maybe afraid that we won't be able to keep a relationship going with this person we are dating and like a lot. However, that's when we should remember why God tells us not to give in to fear but instead to wait and do things on his timetable. Not waiting can lead to something you weren't counting on in the heat of passion. It can lead to pregnancy, of course. But it can also lead to stress in the relationship that comes from stepping into places God says you're not ready for. It can lead to feelings of guilt and shame. Hiding things from others whom you love. That, in turn, can lead to poor self image and other negative feelings. Sometimes it even leads to the relationship breaking apart. So, God invites us to not give in to fear but to wait and do things on his terms. He's wise and knows what will be best for us in the long run.

Abraham was promised a child through his wife Sarah. Remember that? Well, it took a long time. It took years and years. Abraham and Sarah grew tired of waiting for God to give them the promised child. They feared that if they waited any longer, God wouldn't be able to give them a son through Sarah because she was already old and getting older fast. So, what did they do? They came up a plan to use Sarah's servant Hagar as a surrogate mom. But that was a flop. It led to tension in their marriage and home. It created two nations that came from the two sons—

Ishmael and Isaac. And those nations became enemies. Abraham's and Sarah's fear that God would not provide a son resulted in not waiting on the Lord. And that fear and impatience resulted in trouble for both sons for years to come.

When we face uncertainties in our health or the health of our loved ones, fear can set in. Charles and Audrey shared with us what that looked like for them at different times in their lives. Death, accident, cancer, gender struggles. None of us gets through life without being forced into facing things we would never choose to face. Fear can become a constant companion. How will I function without my child? How will I take care of my family with my husband so seriously ill? What will happen to my sick child? I can't bear to lose him! I don't know what to do with my child who is struggling! Fear can paralyze us.

In our Bible reading for today, we find someone else who is motivated by fear. Rather than waiting, he jumps in, he goes ahead of the Lord and loses far more than he hopes to gain by moving ahead.

Reading 1 Samuel 13 by itself, we might feel a little sorry for Saul. Maybe very sorry. He's in a tough spot. First of all, though Saul was a man of great stature, reportedly a head taller than other men (10:23), he was also shy. He didn't seek the limelight. When he was called out to be the king, he was actually hiding, according to chapter 10:22. Nonetheless, Samuel anointed Saul as king. And before that, in chapter 10:8, Samuel the prophet told Saul that he must wait for him to come to Gilgal and sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the Lord there. Saul must wait for Samuel.

In chapter 13, King Saul seems to be in the early days of his reign, but he is old enough to have his son Jonathan leading part of his army. Jonathan takes his army and attacks the Philistines at Geba, says v.3. Jonathan's action, says v.4, makes Israel an intolerable stench in the nostrils of the Philistines. Therefore, Saul calls the nation to war by blowing the trumpet.

However, the odds of Israel winning are small. There's good reason for Saul to be afraid. Israel had no weapons. If you read down to ch.13:22, you find that "not a soldier with Saul and Jonathan had a sword or spear in his hand; only Saul and his son Jonathan had them." Meanwhile the Philistines, according to v.5, had 3000 chariots, plus soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. That powerful army is camped opposite Gilgal where Saul and his army, according to v.6, are hiding in caves and thickets.

Gilgal is the place where Saul is told to wait for Samuel to come and offer sacrifices to the Lord. So Saul sits tight. Waiting is especially hard when the odds are stacked against you. You feel frightened because the enemy is so much bigger than you. You are pretty much unarmed. Your soldiers are afraid and scattering, running for their lives. And you aren't supposed to do anything until Samuel arrives. Who can blame Saul when Samuel doesn't show up. Samuel seemed to say he'd be there by day 7. That day has just passed and so Saul decides, "Well, if we need

to make sacrifices to the Lord before we go into battle, and if Samuel isn't showing up, I'll just do it. Get the sacrifices done. Give God what he wants so that we can get him to help us against these terrifying Philistines.

My heart kind of goes out to Saul. He's stuck between a rock and a hard place. The Philistines are ready to attack. Samuel hasn't shown up and Saul doesn't know how much longer he can wait. Saul's small army is getting smaller by the minute. Only a few hundred are left to face the multitude of strongly armed Philistines. The enemy is powerful.

Saul's fear is understandable.

Now stop and think.

Fear is not a good motivator. Why do we fear? Because we somehow think that God doesn't care about us. Or we think God isn't going to come through for us. Or maybe we feel he isn't able to handle our situation—the enemy is too big, even for God to handle. In our saner moments we know that none of those thoughts are true. God does love his people. God can handle our situation. In his sight, everything is handle-able. Nothing is too much for almighty God. But sometimes in the thick of life's battles, we think the enemy is almighty and our situation hopeless. That's what fear creates in our hearts and minds.

Under such pressure, we might take the easy road. We might give in to the pressure. We might abandon our otherwise good conviction about God and his ways for us because that doesn't seem to work for us. It's not practical. It's not even reasonable.

I've waited several years for a break at work, for an opportunity to climb the ladder. Now's my chance. I've got to be a little deceptive and devious to get to the next rung but a little white lie here and there is a small price to pay. Otherwise I'll get left behind and stuck in this lower position for years to come. Surely, God doesn't want that for me.

I'm not getting any younger. My biological clock is ticking. If I don't marry this person—even though he or she doesn't share my faith in Jesus—I'll never get another chance for love. God's standards are too high and his timeline too tough to wait on. Similarly, if I don't give my body to this nice guy before we're married, I'll never get another chance at love. He won't wait for me.

In school too. If I don't go along with the bullies and tease the new girl, I'll get bullied. I'm afraid of them. I can't take a chance on standing with her against the bullies because that's gonna make my life hell. I can't handle that. I'm not prepared to wait and see if God comes through for me.

This story of Saul's fear reminds us all of our own weakness. Saul didn't wait for Samuel to bring the offerings to the Lord. But that wasn't such a big sign of

weakness or faithlessness. Saul was anointed by Samuel to be the king of God's people. It was a priest's job to present sacrifices. Samuel had not given that job to Saul. But I get that Saul was afraid. A strong and powerful army is opposite you with your weaponless small band of supporters. You can't imagine defeating them, no matter how much you try to picture it in your mind. So I'm willing to give Saul a break.

Samuel, however, is not willing to do that. And the reason is not simply that Saul offered a sacrifice that he wasn't supposed to offer. It was Samuel being directed by God. And God said that Saul did not have his heart set on the Lord and his kingdom. Samuel's condemnation of Saul in v.13 & 14 focusses on Saul's heart as God sees it.

*1 Sam 13:13 Samuel said to Saul, "You acted foolishly. You have not kept the command Yahweh (the Lord) your God gave you. If you had, Yahweh would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. <sup>14</sup> But now your kingdom will not endure; Yahweh has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's commands (to you)."*

The issue is the desire of the king's heart. Is the king—and are you and I—heart-set on following the Lord? If you read on through stories of Saul's kingship, you discover that he repeatedly shows no desire to honour the will of God. He is a pragmatic and proud king. He does what seems to be the most advantageous to his self-preservation. God does not condemn him through Samuel because he was a sinner. Everyone is a sinner. God sees that Saul, despite his failures, is not set on serving the Lord and letting the Lord be the true King of Israel—the one who directs the nation's steps.

David, who became king after Saul, was also a sinner. No better than Saul. The list is long of David's moral failures—everything from envy to adultery to murder. But David loved the Lord. David repeatedly recognizes his failures and runs to the Lord in repentance and to seek forgiveness. Acts 13:22 recalls the fall of Saul and the rise of David, saying, "*After removing Saul, (the Lord) made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'*" The truth is that David did a lot of things that God didn't want him to do too. But he repented of those things because he really—in his heart—wanted to do the things that honoured the Lord his God. He became a valiant king over Israel because, despite his failures, he looked to the Lord and sought to do God's will. His fear of enemies was overcome by God's grace in him.

King David, for all of his good desires, still needed a greater king than himself. So do we. David was not the greatest king ever raised up by God for his people because David failed himself, failed others and failed the Lord many times. But through the line of David, the Lord God brought to us King Jesus, our Saviour—the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Jesus did everything the Lord wanted and nothing the Lord did not want. He is our selfless, all-giving King. He faced our greatest enemy—Satan, sin and death—all alone! And he came out victoriously! He ensures that we are forever right with God, defeating sin for us so we stand before God pure and holy in the name of Jesus! Our King Jesus stepped down from his throne in heaven to serve us. The great King of heaven became one of the least among humanity in order to rescue us. By his grace, he takes away our fears. By his grace, he gives us patience in the waiting. By his grace, he enables us to trust God in the hard times. By his grace, he gives us strength to endure through the trials. By his grace he offers us courage in the face of temptation. Yes, friends, by his grace he blesses us with peace that passes all understanding. He is the full expression of what it means to be someone who is after God's own heart. There is no one else like him. Jesus is the one in whom the hopes and fears of all the years are met.

Remember, congregation, in Jesus, we are no longer slaves to fear. We need not fear the opinions of others. It's God's opinion that counts the most. As we set our hearts on him and his eternal purposes, we become more focused and less fearful.

Think of someone like Noah. In his day, everyone was wicked, says the Bible. But Noah was a man after God's heart. He walked faithfully with the Lord (Gen 11), seeking to follow God when it wasn't common or popular. For many years, he built an ark for a coming flood. The world had never known a flood before then. No one would have believed one was coming. Everyone would have thought Noah was a kook. But he listened to God and God rescued him from the flood and used him to rebuild humanity. God provided Noah with the grace and strength to face the opposition and mockery, to wait patiently for God's appointed time. Doing things God's way was the best way for Noah, just as it is for us. It leads to peace.

We have God's grace in us because of Jesus. By grace, we can trust Jesus to take our fears, hold us close to himself and fill us with peace. Peace when troubles like sea-billows roar. Peace when temptations arise. Peace when choosing God's will is the road less travelled. Whatever fears we have can be—and have been—met in Christ our Saviour!