Fears. We all have them but have you ever checked out some of the things that make up some of the Phobia lists. I got on a website the other day - Phobialist.com. Check out what some people fear:

- Aulophobias - Fear of Flutes
- Arachibutyrophobia - Fear of peanut butter sticking to the roof of your mouth
- Alextorophobia - Fear of Chickens
- Ablutophobia - Fear of washing or bathing
- Aurophobia - Fear of gold
- Androphobia - Fear of Men
- Automatonophobia - Fear of ventriloquist's dummies
- Ichthyophobia - Fear of Fish

I thought that would be an appropriate one to include in our list because I think if we did a survey and asked why is it that we don't fish more aggressively and more intentionally it would all boil down to one word - Fear. We are afraid aren't we? We may express it in different ways - what if they ask the hard question? What if I sound stupid? What if it get's awkward? What if I get fired? What if they walk away? What if it ends the relationship? What if I say it wrong? But it all boils down to fear.

And because of our fear we often shrink back. And then comes the guilt--well I know I should - I need to talk to them - if I don't who will - -but then our fear overwhelms us and we choose not to act. And then we hear stories out of the Scripture and we're reminded of what Jesus called us to - Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men and we want to do it but we just can't.

Did you know that the key people in the gospels, those who followed Jesus, were all a bunch of cowards themselves?

Remember when Jesus was arrested? Did his best friends defend him? Peter did for a moment but then they all-the twelve guys who were his disciples - all took off running because they were afraid of what might happen. No longer did they want to be associated with this man who had been arrested.

Remember the time when Peter was approached by some people asking him if he was one of Jesus followers? Peter says no I don't know him. One passage said he even cursed at the one who posed the question to him.

Of course we know that their fear and their cowardice eventually turned to courage and they began to set the world on fire as they shared of what they had seen and heard. Something happened to them that I'm hoping can inspire and encourage us as well today.
We're back to the book of Acts today and in our story we'll gain insight into how first century Christians viewed Christianity and why they were so willing to become fishers of men in spite of the fact that they had a whole lot more to fear than you and I will ever have to fear when it comes to what we believe about the Bible.

Acts 4:23
In case you weren't here last week this is a continuation of the story that we looked at as we tried to answer the question Why Fish? Let me give you a brief review. Jesus has been tried crucified, died, buried, and risen from the dead. Peter and John, two of those guys who were cowards, have now been transformed and they have become Fishers of Men because they have seen Jesus after his resurrection.

As they are on their way to the temple to pray they heal this crippled guy that's been laying by the temple gates and it causes a stir because he jumps up and heads in to the temple singing and everyone is shocked because they remember him as the crippled dude whose been begging for money for years.

Peter, former coward, now transformed dude seizes an opportunity to start preaching. Some of the big shots in the temple don't take kindly to his preaching - especially when he starts mentioning the name Jesus - so the security guards come and arrest he and John and throw them in the temple jail for the night.

BTW at our meeting last week our elders approved sanctuary security so if you're caught dozing or playing on your iphones during worship you're likely to get escorted out of here and down the hall where you'll have to spend the rest of the day playing with 3 and 4 year olds.

So they get arrested for talking about Jesus in the temple. Sounds a little crazy doesn't it? But that's what the scripture says. These big shots were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead in the temple.

Reminds me of a time when a local organization was going to use our FLC for a dinner that they were hosting for families. They asked one of our staff to come and to welcome those who would be attending. He agreed to do so and even commented that he' be glad to offer a prayer to open the event. They told him thanks but no thanks. We've got people of different religious affiliations who are going to be here and we can't take a chance that we might offend someone. So you want to use our building. You'd like us to welcome everyone whose here. But you don't want us to offer a prayer in Jesus' name? Well--we opened the building. We did our best to help make their event a success. We welcomed those who came. And we offered a prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, the one and only Son of God.
The next day the religious leaders bring them in to the temple conference room and say look - you guys have got to quit speaking about Jesus. So this opens another door for Peter to preach a sermon and he takes off in response to their question of: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

So he lets them have it. I remember my dad commenting to me one time when I was preparing for a sermon - you don't have to give them the whole nine yards. I still don't know what that moans but Peter gave them the whole nine yards. Ho came out with both barrels blazing and made that statement that moans so much to us today. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given to men by which they must be saved. God has done something unique thru this one and only son of his and if we don't talk about it no one is going to know.

Not liking what they are hearing the religious loaders send them off again. What are we going to do now they begin to ask themselves. After conferring for a time they call them back in and say ok guys enough's enough. Ono final time we are going to ask-no we are going to command you to stop speaking and if you don't well - phooey just get on out of here. Acts 4:23.

Are you there? In the immortal words of Paul Harvey ... And now the rest of the story. On their release Peter and John won't back to their own people. So they're heading back home to their peeps. Gonna hook up with their posse. Bet you didn't know that's where those two words came from did you? People, Peeps, Posse. It's in the Greek somewhere I'm sure.

They go back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard this - Peter and John are sharing about everything that took place - healing a crippled guy, sharing a great message, getting arrested, getting questioned, preaching another great message, and then finally being released.

When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. Now if you would have been a part of that group what would your prayer have been? Father, thank you for this day. That's the way we always start our prayers isn't it? And there's nothing wrong with that - we should be thankful for the day that we've been blessed with. And we'd probably prayed thanking God for the safe return of our dear friends Peter and John. They could have easily boon killed or crucified because of what they did and what they said but thank you for sparing them. And now God would you please protect us, and watch over us, and shield us, and guard us, and be our mighty fortress, and be our stronghold, and be our..... whatever other word you could come up with like defender. Yeah be our defender because you know we're going to need one now that those two guys have gotten things stirred up again. In Jesus name, Amen. Fortunately that's not the type of prayer this group of people offered when they heard Peter and John tell what happened at the temple and to them. And in that moment of time this group of people had one of those wow moments. You remember us talking
about them here a few years ago? When you have that moment or that event or that occurrence that causes you to go Wow God. I think that is what happened to this group of believers and it dawned on them what was going on around them and in their world.

When Peter and John return from their overnight trip and share about what had happened it dawns on them that they are in the middle of something extraordinary. And not only are they in the middle of it they have a huge part in this story. Yahweh God has chosen to involve them in something that he has been up to for hundreds of years. And when they prayed they don't pray like I and maybe you often do - protect me, provide for me, guard me. They realize that they are involved in something extraordinary and they pray an unbelievable prayer. A prayer that I wish I could pray and make a part of my daily life. A prayer that I wish our church could pray and make a part of its daily life. That it would be more than just words that we say. That it would become a part of our DNA so to speak.

Look at what Luke records as their prayer:

- **Sovereign Lord.** Andy Stanley writes of this prayer regarding their addressing of Sovereign Lord - God who is large and in charge. Ajith Fernando in his commentary on Acts says that when this title is put together with the Christians affirmation that God is creator, we see that his sovereignty over creation is being proclaimed. The implication is that the One who created the world is more powerful than those whom he created. Therefore, nothing can thwart his plans.

Sovereign Lord they said you made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything that's in them. Pretty powerful way to start out a prayer isn't it?

You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant our father David. Wow moment coming here. They are remembering something that they were taught as children. Maybe their parents read it to them. Maybe their grandparents shared it with them. Maybe they remember hearing the priests in the temple reading from the Psalm.

Look at their prayer and let's see what they are remembering:

- "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his anointed one."

They are remembering that Psalm they had learned as little children that told them that when the Messiah would come that the rulers of the Gentiles and the Kings would try to take a stand against the holy one of God the Messiah. And even though they would plot against him it would all be in vain. And all of a sudden it dawns on them-WOW-we've seen this fulfilled.

Look at the next part of their prayer:

- Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed.
That Psalm that they had memorized as little children. That Psalm that had been quoted and passed down from generation to generation. That Psalm that had us all looking forward to the coming of the Messiah and wondering what it meant that the Kings would stand against him - Wow. It's happened. We've seen it. We were part of it. We were there. We saw King Herod and Pontius Pilate conspire to stop what you were planning to do through your chosen one--our Messiah.

All of a sudden this group of believers realizes they are in the middle of the fulfillment of a messianic prophecy. They have been integral parts in the unfolding of God's plan and they had almost missed it because when Jesus was arrested they began praying for his freedom. When he was put on trial they were pleading that Pilate would let him go. When they heard the verdict announced they began praying for a miracle that Yahweh would intervene and change Pilate's heart. And then they watched him be crucified and buried, in a tomb and I'm sure they were wondering what's happened? Where are you God? Have you lost control of this situation?

And then 3 days later word begins to spread that he is alive. And I'm sure they are wondering what's going on - how did this happen and then it hit them. One of those wow moments. Oh God this was your plan from the very beginning and we are a part of it. We are a part of the live action that you are doing right now and that's why they addressed him as Sovereign God.

Verse 28
They, speaking of Herod and Pilate, they did what your power and your will had decided beforehand should happen.

For a moment it seemed like things were completely out of control. Herod and Pilate had done the unthinkable. They were showing off their power and authority that day but in reality Sovereign God was still in control and those guys only did what God allowed them to do. They only did what God had already told through his prophets was going to happen. And although it seemed like God had forsaken them and his son during that time he was there all along. He was bringing about his will as he had planned it out thousands of years before.

When those gathered in this room started to pray-what do you think went thru the minds of Peter and John, Andrew, James and the rest of the disciples? Luke doesn't say that they were there but it's a good guess that the disciples were still hanging close to one another.

And I wonder if they felt a sense of embarrassment? Embarrassed because they were standing with the Savior in the garden that night he was arrested and they wanted to fight? Embarrassed because they ran and hid when he was taken away. Embarrassed that they didn't see what God was doing and how this was all working out. They thought God had messed up. They thought they had followed the wrong messiah. And now wow. We were right there and we missed the opportunity that God had given us.
And don't you think it hurt Peter most of all. Knowing that he denied knowing Jesus. I love Peter for his strength, his willingness to jump when others wouldn't but I bet he kicked himself at this moment for not recognizing what God was up to and he wished he could have the opportunity to have responded differently to those questions of aren't you one of the followers of Jesus?

But in this moment it finally dawns on this group of people WOW God is up to something special. And then they make their requests. Let's see how this group of believers continues with their prayer.

Acts 4:29
Now Lord consider their threats - You ever thought about praying that kind of a prayer for your enemies? These folk have some pretty powerful people that don't think to highly of them but instead of saying God can you get rid of these people--can you wipe them out? They don't ask that their enemies be destroyed because who knows maybe God wants to use those enemies to bring about his will. They don't pray that we're not arrested or persecuted because who knows maybe God could use their arrest or their persecution to bring about his will. Instead they pray Lord consider their threats.

Webster's defines the word consider with these definitions:
- To think about carefully
- To take into account
- To regard or treat in an attentive or kindly way

They're not looking for an answer. They're not looking for a decision. They're not looking for a sign. They just say Lord if you could - would you consider, think about carefully, take into account, treat in an attentive way, the threats that we may receive from Herod, Pilate, the chief priests, the elders, and the religious leaders.

And then this group of believers ask for something that I think very few of us who call ourselves Christian have ever asked for and I include myself in that group. I mentioned this a couple of weeks ago that our prayers are often like the Christmas in Mayberry song that we sing Give me this, Give me that, bless me Lord I pray--Grant me what I think I need to make it through the day.

But this group of people, for at least this moment in time, have the proper perspective of what God, Sovereign Lord is up to. They ask for something that I myself have begun to ask for, because I desperately need it in my life as well. They ask for something that I have been praying the past few weeks would become a part of the life of our church as well - something that is so out of the ordinary in the vast majority of our prayers.

Here's a group who's scared and whose lives are in jeopardy. They're not asking God to protect them, or to deliver them, or to destroy their enemies because who knows maybe it's God's will that those types of things happen to them. Check out this powerful prayer that they offer.
Now Lord, consider their threats, and check this out, and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

Wow. You ever prayed that? You ever finished one of those bless me, protect me, give me, help me get this job, help me remember all the stuff I studied for this test, help this to be the one, bring healing to that person prayers with God if you don't help and you don't bless the way I want and you don't answer like I'm hoping then would you at least do this one thing - would you give me the ability to speak your word with boldness, with great boldness?

Have you ever prayed that? I'm hoping you have but I'm guessing you're a lot like me and it doesn't happen because our prayers are all about us, about me. Because in my world- I'm sovereign. The concern is for the stuff I'm involved in. It's all about me because I forget that God has invited me into something much larger than myself- something much greater than I can ever begin to imagine- to be a player in the midst of what he's up to in this world.

Do you know why they could pray that? Because they understood sovereign God is doing what he wants to do and that he is currently in their midst doing something and they had just seen it and witnessed it. And now they are beginning to understand that God has invited them into the process.

Jim I want you to be a player and Matt I want you to be a player and Sarah I want you to be a player and Mike I want you to be a player. He's inviting the whole group to be involved in what he is doing and bringing about. They realize that God is going to do what God wants to do regardless of what others may think or have been told. I believe they have connected with God like very few people have ever connected with him.

And this connection didn't cause them to take a step back and say well if God's going to do what God's going to do then I don't guess I have to do anything because God's going to do it anyway. This wow moment didn't cause them to take a step back- it caused them to take a step forward. It caused them to take two steps forward in their relationship with Jehovah God. They had come face to face with a Sovereign God. They had come face to face with a God who was actively involved in their lives even when they hadn't recognized it and this connection with a Sovereign God gave them the courage to say enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

You know what boldness is. Boldness is not volume. Unfortunately we think the loudest person or speaker is the boldest but boldness and volume don't necessarily go hand in hand.

When I or Doc or whomever stands here and speaks on a Sunday morning - this isn't boldness either - his is what our job is. Some of you may view this as bold but what we do here isn't boldness. This is what we get paid to do. This and check email. You're sitting there looking at me - what else am I gonna do? I know you don't want to see me
dance and I gave up doing backflips and cartwheels - well I didn't really give them up because I never could do them.

Boldness isn't the guy standing on the corner at Commonwealth Stadium or Papa John's Stadium holding a huge cross and telling people to Repent because the end is near. That's not boldness because those that guy is safe. It's not like they are going to be arrested. He or she probably doesn't know any of the people who are passing by them. He or she will probably never see those people again unless he or she chooses to stand on that corner and yell at people every time there's a home game. If they are there the people who use that walkway each week to get to the game are probably gonna start finding another way to get to the stadium. And there's no chance they are going to lose their job doing what they are doing either.

You know what boldness is? Boldness is the soft-spoken person in the company who decides I'm going to say Merry Christmas and not happy holiday. Boldness is the person who when they hear of a friend whose been stricken with an illness or is lying in bed dying from a disease goes to them and shares about who Christ is because they want to see that friend in Heaven when they get there. Boldness is the guy or gal who knows their parent or sibling refuses to talk about God and Jesus Christ but decides I'm going to open the door because I want my dad, I want my mom, I want my brother or 1 want my sister to understand that there's a God who loves them and gave his one and only son for them. And come you know what or high water I'm going to talk to them about Him. That's boldness.

Boldness is handing out that CD/DVD. Boldness is handing out that book. Boldness is yes I know this is uncomfortable but can we talk about. Boldness is through your personality, gifts, and or talents, using what God has blessed you with to simply speak up when the opportunity presents itself.

Boldness is simply speaking into people's lives when the door opens. It's not about volume, a personality, a sign, street preaching or wearing a rainbow afro and having a t-shirt with John 3:16 written on it. It's about men and women like we said the very first week who have been perfectly positioned in someone's life. And as God creates opportunities to take advantage of those opportunities for the sake of seeing that person place their faith in Jesus Christ.

The thing that moved, intimidated and frightened people in Jerusalem about Christians was not there volume. What was intimidating and frightening and strange was this--that even though they could lose their job, their place in society, possibly their life, in spite of what they had to lose they were insistent upon when they could - talking about Jesus.

Why would they do that? Because suddenly in Jerusalem a handful of believers had a wow moment when they realized that Sovereign God was at work and had been using them as a part of his activity in the world.
How can I not fish? How could I refuse that? Why wouldn't I harness my fear and speak boldly which may be a whisper, an invitation, a word. How can I not speak boldly if there's a sovereign God who is active in this world and has invited me to participate along side of him?

I hope you accomplished homework #1. If you weren't with us on week one of this series I asked those in attendance to write a letter to the person or persons that led them to know Christ as their Savior. The reason we did so was to remind us that we were all fish once. We were all swimming around waiting to be caught and that person or persons did exactly that. They helped us get caught and look where we are today. The other reason was to remind us how grateful we were that they were fishing that day. That they took the time to wet a line and to invite us or share with us about this man Jesus Christ. I hope you've written that letter. If you haven't I'd still encourage you to do so.

Homework #2: Would you be willing for one week - commit to doing this for one week- would you be willing to add to your prayer each day for one week and enable me, your servant, to speak your word with great boldness.

That's a scary thing isn't it? Because if we pray it then God may just provide us the opportunities to act upon it.

If we can make that a part of our daily prayers here's what I think we'll happen:

- 1) We'll become more aware of the opportunities that are around us

They are there every day aren't they? Opportunities because as I shared last week we pass by people who are crippled every day. Crippled by fear, by worry, by addictions, by anger, by stress, by pressures from work, family, and friends. And praying that prayer will make us more aware of the opportunities that God places before us.

- 2) We'll be forced to face the fear that has crippled a lot of us as Christians-a fear that needs to faced and conquered.

The fear of broaching the subject, the fear of entering into a conversation, the fear of contradicting what you've always gone along with, the fear of letting it be known that you stand in a different place with a different set of values.

And you know why we should be bold? Because the God that this group of people prayed to is the same God that you and I pray too and guess what folk - He is still sovereign. Why do we fear when we serve a sovereign God? The God who can take the crucifixion of his son-plant it in the middle of history and make it the reference point for our life. What in the world do we have to be afraid of?

Second reason we should be bold is because God is as active now as he was the day this story took place and Luke recorded it. He is - isn't he? You've had those wow moments haven't you? And the reason that you've had them is because God,
Sovereign God, is still active in what's going on in the lives of his people even today. 2,000 years later and he is still acting, moving, and unfolding his plan through his people.

Third reason that you and I should be bold is because we have been invited to have a part in God's unfolding plan for this time and for this moment in history. Knowing that how can we choose to be a bystander? How can we choose to sit on the sideline?

He's not going to stop what he's doing. His plan isn't going to stop if you and I choose not to participate but why in the world would we not want to be a part of what God is doing? Why would we want to sit it out? Why would we want to stand to the side and just watch?

Have we lost sight of Sovereign God? Have we lost sight that God is active in the world and that He blesses you and me with the honor of being invited in to what he is going to do anyway with or without us? What an honor it is to be included.

Enable us - enable me - to speak your word with boldness and let us not be worried about outcome because you know who's in charge of outcomes - Sovereign God. Not fearful old Jon but sovereign God. I'm just a player - I'm just a part. God's allowed me and you to be a player in someone else's life. What could happen in our lives if those few simple words became a part of our daily prayer? What could happen in our church if those few simple words became a part of our daily prayer?