I’m speaking on a topic today that I really need to hear because I struggle with fear. I was reminded of this a couple of years ago when Beth and I were out driving. When we came to a railroad crossing, the lights starting flashing and the arms came down—and I stopped about 50 yards from the tracks. Beth asked me what I was doing and I told her that I didn’t want the train to tip over and land on us.

Apparently she had never seen me do this before. Don’t get me started about my Hydrophobia (fear of water), Dentophobia (fear of dentists) or my Arctofanphobia (fear of Bear fans). BTW, Forbes has just declared that Packer fans are the best in the NFL. Beth and I will witness this first-hand on a Thursday night in October as our daughters just bought us tickets to the Packer/Viking game.

It’s difficult to list all the fears in the world because there are literally millions. From the fears and racial tensions flying around Ferguson, Missouri, to the Ebola epidemic, to the anxiety caused by the ISIS crisis after an American journalist was beheaded, to whatever your personal fears are. I read this week that there’s even something called, Phobophobia, which is the fear of developing a phobia.

Last Sunday we learned that the antidote to anxiety is the peace of God. Our text today teaches that the solution to fear is the presence of God. Here’s our main point: *The Lord will never leave those who belong to Him.* We could also say it like this: *Because God is here, we should have no fear.*

Last fall on Sunday nights we looked at the various names for God. This fall we’ll focus on “Getting to Know God” as we consider the attributes of God. This series will begin on Sunday night, September 14. On Sunday, September 7th at 6:00 p.m., which is two weeks from this weekend, we’re going to have a “Vision Night” that will be followed by a business meeting. Please make every effort to attend, as we will give some attention to what God has in store for Edgewood in the coming years.

One of the names we studied last fall was Jehovah Shammah, which means, “*The God who is there.*” To help us remember this truth, let’s repeat this phrase together: “*God is there, He is here, He is everywhere.*”

In the Garden of Eden we read that everything was perfect because the Creator (Elohim) wanted Adam and Eve to live in a place of beauty and comfort as seen in Genesis 2:9: “*And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.*” As beautiful as the creation was, the real joy was that “*God himself walked in the garden in the cool of the day…*” (Genesis 3:8). God’s presence was to be their greatest pleasure. But because Adam and Eve chose to disobey, the entire human race was plunged into darkness and death. Thankfully, God continued to reveal Himself and make His presence known. Genesis 5:22 tells us that Enoch “*walked with God 300 years.*”
Moses, who doubted God’s presence, had an encounter with the Almighty at the burning bush, and later declared in Exodus 33:15: “If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here.” Moses wasn’t going to mobilize unless God moved with him. Yahweh demonstrated His powerful presence to the Israelites while they were in the desert of despair by using two symbols. By day, a cloud led them, and by night a pillar of fire pronounced His presence. God was personally and powerfully present with His people at all times and in all places. Let’s repeat this phrase again: “God is there, He is here, He is everywhere.”

On top of that, the Israelites had a portable tabernacle that symbolized the fact that God was with them. This tabernacle replaced the tent of meeting that Moses set up (Exodus 33:7-11). According to Exodus 25:8, this was to be the “dwelling place for God.” This helped the Israelites know that God was perpetually present with them.

Actually, God is omnipresent. Simply stated, this means that God is always wherever He needs to be to do whatever needs to be done. He’s everywhere present at the same time.

We’re going to camp in Isaiah 41:10 but before we get there let’s quickly set the context. When we understand the problems God’s people were experiencing, the intensity and application of the promise we find here will go up exponentially.

As a result of Judah’s sins, they will be taken captive. The crazy thing is that Isaiah is writing about what will happen 180 years in the future. Even before God’s people sinned and were judged and were sent to Babylon for 70 years, God is telling them that they will return and He will bless them once again. He is such a gracious God!

Isaiah has been referred to as the Bible in miniature because it has 66 chapters and the Bible has 66 books. The first 39 chapters correspond with the Old Testament as they speak of judgment and the final 27, beginning with chapter 40, echo the New Testament’s emphasis on grace and comfort and restoration. These chapters were written to afflicted people who were filled with fear. Check out the tone in this section as found in Isaiah 40:1-2: “‘Comfort, yes, comfort My people!’ says your God. ‘Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned...’” And now drop down to the last verse in chapter 40: “But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

God still speaks tenderly to those going through trials and He offers comfort to the discouraged and dismayed, and promises to renew strength for the weary. God promises His presence in order to free us from fear in our families, in our jobs (or lack of jobs), in the middle of our marriage messes, with our school stresses, with our health situations, with our friendships, with our finances, problems from our past, worries about the future, or in any other situation.

Let’s look now at how chapter 41 begins. God’s people were no doubt wondering why they were going through so many problems. God puts it into perspective by reminding them how great He is. In verse 1 we see that He’s the judge of all the nations: “Let us come near together for judgment.” In verses 2-3, He establishes that He’s the ruler of all: “Who raised up one from
the east…who gave the nations before Him, and made Him rule over kings?” In verse 4 we see that He is the Creator and Sustainer of all: “I, the Lord, am the first; and with the last I am He.” In verse 6, the nations do some neighboring but it’s to help each other turn to idols and away from the true God: “Everyone helped his neighbor, and said to his brother, ‘Be of good courage!’ So the craftsman encouraged the goldsmith; he who smooths with the hammer inspired him who strikes the anvil, saying, ‘It is ready for the soldering’; then he fastened it with pegs, that it might not totter.”

Here’s a question. What do you turn to in times of trial? Do you focus on man-made resources when you’re afraid? Listen. Trials help us see what we’re really trusting in.

What’s happening here? God is reminding His people of His greatness and that as judge, ruler, creator and Lord, He will handle the ungodly nations – that’s a good reminder for us today as we watch evil spread in our world. With all the upheaval and uproar, He’s on the throne. And then He reaffirms His relationship with His people in verse 8. Notice the contrast that’s introduced with the word “But…” Things are different for those who have a relationship with the Father: “But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend.” And notice the last part of verse 9: “…I have chosen you and have not cast you away.”

We are servants – what an honor! 
We are chosen – what a comfort! 
We are friends – what a privilege! The word “friend” means “my beloved.” 
And we’ll never be cast away – what a promise!

Now we’re ready to look at our passage from Isaiah 41:10: “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

God tells us what not to do – don’t fear or be dismayed and then He tells us why – because He is with us and because He is our God. And then He tells us what He will do – God will strengthen, help, and uphold us.

The word fear initially meant “flight” or “fleeing.” Instead of fleeing from our fears, Isaiah gives us five facets of God’s presence to help us face our fears.

1. **God is present:** I will live without fear because He is with me. Notice that it doesn’t say God was with me, or that He might be with me but that He is with me: “Fear not, for I am with you….” This can be translated as, “There is nothing to fear because I am with you.” This is repeated two more times in verses 13-14. It’s been said that the phrase, “Fear not” or “Be not afraid” is found 365 times in the Bible, one for each day of the year.

Friend, in order to face your fears, the first thing to remember is that if you’re saved, God is always present with you. Psalm 23:4 says, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me…”
We see a great illustration of this in John 6. The disciples are in a boat. It’s dark. The wind is blowing hard. They’re afraid. They had already rowed 3 or 4 miles. Then they see Jesus walking on the waves and are frightened. Check out what happens next in verses 20-21: “But He said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid.’ Then they were glad to take him into the boat and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.” Check this out. When Jesus stepped into their problem, their problem was solved. The presence of Immanuel brought immediate help.

After giving the Great Commission, which involved going and making disciples, Jesus promised His presence in Matthew 28:20: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” When you’re filled with evangephobia (the fear of evangelism), remember this truth and declare it out loud: I will have no fear because He is here!

2. God is personal: I will not be dismayed because He is my God. Check out the next phrase: “Be not dismayed, for I am your God…” To be dismayed means to be broken and filled with fear. It literally means, “To look around anxiously as one does in a state of alarm.” Would you notice that the key to not being dismayed is to make sure that He is your God personally? I Samuel 30:6 says that David was distressed because the men were talking about stoning him but that changed when he “found strength in the Lord his God.”

Is He your God? This promise becomes activated when you personalize your relationship with Him by trusting in Jesus for forgiveness of sins. Can you say, “He is my God today?”

He is present: I will live without fear because God is with me.
He is personal: I will not be dismayed because He is my God.

These two promises give us confidence to make the next proclamation…

3. God is powerful: I will lean on Him to strengthen me. Look at the next phrase: “I will strengthen you…” To strengthen means to become “bold, courageous and to conquer.” I love what Corrie ten Boom once said: “In times of fear I don’t wrestle, I nestle.” Psalm 29:11: “The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.”

Let’s fast forward one chapter to Isaiah 42:3. This passage is quoted in Matthew 12:20 when referring to Jesus: “A bruised reed he will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench.” Jesus does not break us when we’re broken nor does He smash us when we’re smoldering.

A reed was a hollow-stemmed plant that grew along riverbanks in Palestine and was considered a symbol of weakness and worthlessness in the Bible. The word “bruised” means to be “broken by calamity.” It’s a picture of an individual who has been wiped out by life and has been fileted by fears.

Do you feel weak and worthless? Have you been battered and thrown around by the storms of life? Has sin scarred you? If so, listen to these gentle words: “A bruised reed He will not break.”
Jesus is gentle and will not break a bruised reed “and smoking flax he will not quench.” I like how another translation puts it: “and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out.” Wicks were made out of linen and when the oil ran out the flame would flicker and emit a cloud of smelly smoke. The smoke would become an irritant so people would just reach out and snuff it out.

Jesus refuses to snuff out the smoldering. Instead, He leans over, carefully adds oil to the bowl, being cautious not to drown the wick and then gently blows to get the fire going again.

When you’re hurting, He’s ready to help. He will not break you or snuff you out. Because He’s powerful, He will strengthen you.

*He is present: I will live without fear because God is with me.*
*He is personal: I will not be dismayed because He is my God.*
*He is powerful: I will lean on Him to strengthen me.*

We see next that God provides practical help when we trust Him…

4. **God is practical: I will trust Him to help me.** “Yes, I will help you.” Drop down to verse 13: “Fear not, I will help you” and verse 14: “Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I will help you…” After being reminded that the Lord will never leave us or forsake us, Hebrews 13:6 says: “So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” God will never “unfriend” us when we do something stupid or when we sin or when we’re stressed out but instead He promises to help us.

In what ways do you need God’s help right now? He will help in a very practical way. The other day I was running with Chris James and he said something so profound that I had to send myself an email so I wouldn’t forget: “What I can’t do, God can do!” I love Jehoshaphat’s prayer in 2 Chronicles 20:12: “For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.”

*God is present, personal, powerful and practical. There’s one more facet that will help us face our fears…*

5. **God will provide: I believe that God will uphold me with His righteous right hand.** The word “uphold” means to hold up or grasp, to support. The idea is similar to the word undergird which means to make secure underneath (that’s what they’re doing right now to the Centennial Bridge, right? It’s certainly inconvenient to have it closed but I’m glad they’re fixing it). We are upheld by His “righteous right hand.” The right hand in the Bible is the hand of promise, symbolic of the best and the strongest (that’s not a diss on those who are left-handed, BTW).

Do you feel like you’ve failed? Do you wonder why you fall so many times? Hold on to the truth that He upholds you when you feel like you’re barely holding on. Psalm 145:13-14: “The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.” He helps us and He holds us when we’re shaking like a leaf.
I want to point out something else from this passage. Three different times God says, “I will…”

- *I will strengthen you*
- *Yes, I will help you.*
- *I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Friends, when God says it; that settles it. There’s no if or maybe or might. He will.

*The Lord will never leave those who belong to Him. Because God is here, we should have no fear. He is there. He is here. He is everywhere.*

While most of us live in the present, some of us are fearful of the future and others of us are piled by the past. I’m thankful that God is an ever-present help for trouble today, and I’m also glad that Jehovah Shammah has the future covered. In an article called, “The God of My Future Problems,” the author begins by defining God’s “prevenient grace.” This literally means the grace that goes before. In every situation of life God is already at work before I get there. He is working creatively, strategically and redemptively for my good and His glory in order to accomplish His purposes.

While I am struggling with the problems of today, God is at work providing solutions for the things I’m going to face tomorrow. He’s working in situations right now that I haven’t even faced yet. He’s preparing them for me and me for them. Or to say it another way: “While I’m living in Sunday, He’s already in Tuesday.” Are you worried about next week? Chill out. He’s already there. How about next year? Don’t sweat it. He’s got it covered. Since God is already in the future, you can trust Him today and put your hope in Him for tomorrow, even if trials come your way (and they will).

It would be enough if God simply walked with us through the events of life. But He does much more than that. He goes ahead of us, clearing the way, arranging the details of life, so that when we get there, we can have confidence that God has already been there before us. Knowing that God holds the future in His hands should provide us with comfort today.

**Is He Your God?**

In the Old Testament God’s presence was demonstrated in the tabernacle. That’s where people would go to meet with God. When Jesus came, John 1:14 says that He “tabernacled” among us: “*The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us…*” He was sent from the presence of the Father and He is the presence…and He takes us into the presence of the Father when we put our faith in Him for forgiveness of sins.

If you have not yet been born again, that is the decision you need to make. Confess your sins and profess Jesus as your Lord and Savior and then the promise of His presence will be fulfilled in your life. I came across another fear this week called “Euphobia,” or the fear of good news. Don’t be afraid of the best news ever! Believe it and receive it.

Fear not...be not dismayed…
God is with you – He’s present
He is your God – He’s personal
He will strengthen you – He’s powerful
He will help you – He’s practical
He will uphold you – He’s your provider

Is there anywhere you can go where God is not present? When you drive home? When you go to work or school or to the store? When you do some neighboring? When you have gospel conversations? When you face problems or pain or difficult people? Christian, you’re not going anywhere without God!

I like how John Piper restates these promises using five different prepositions…

    I am your God – over you.
    I am with you – by your side.
    I will strengthen you – from inside of you.
    I will help you – all around you.
    I will uphold you – from underneath you.

God is over you, by you, inside you, around you, and underneath you. Even when a train is about to tip over on you.

Invitation: I’d Need a Savior

Commissioning of Andrew (and Tyler)