

A couple of weeks ago, I was sitting at my desk and out of the corner of my eye I thought I saw movement. Now, I have had a cardboard tube propped against my fridge for several months at this point, waiting for one of my colleagues to come grab it, and as I looked to examine the source of the movement, out from under this tube crawled what to my mind was about the world's biggest, hairiest, grossest looking spider I could imagine. It was an instantaneous showdown, because of course, logical people would have just stood up, smushed the thing, and been done with it. However, when it comes to spiders, particularly of the fuzzy variety, I am not logical. At all. So I sat there, staring at this thing, overthinking how precisely I was going to murder it. I didn't want to step on it, because I have a weird thing about insects crunching and I didn't want it on my shoe. The closest thing I had on hand was my Bible, and that seemed wrong, smushing a spider with the Word of God. So I sat there, desperately trying to figure out what exactly my weapon of choice was going to be in order to rid my office of this horrifying, little creature.

I finally landed on another book I had nearby and I swear, it's like this thing knew. The second I grabbed that book, that little monster scurried under my fridge...leaving me entirely stuck as to what to do next. I will admit, I may have kicked my fridge a couple of times trying to scare it back

out into the open, however, again the logical thing, which someone later asked me, “Did you move the fridge?” was a big, ole NOPE because while I was willing to face Harry the Spider if he came back out, I wasn’t going to give him the ability to scurry out at me while my hands were full holding my fridge! So...here we have sat...for weeks, Harry and I. Me wondering if he’s still under the fridge. Him wondering if I’m still out here waiting to smush him. All because in that one moment of when we first faced each other down, I was too afraid to do the thing that I knew I was capable of...stepping on a spider.

Fear is a huge motivator in our lives. Even if we like to think of ourselves as brave, capable, confident people, we all know that there are those handful of things...spiders, maybe, that when faced with them, that fear grips us and it won’t let go. And fear has a *loud, loud* voice, telling us all the things we can and can’t do, all the things we should just plain avoid attempting to do because we’re just going to fail. Fear wiggles into our brains like eight legged arachnid and tangles us up in all sorts of webs, keeping us stuck, incapable of doing even the simplest of things, and most definitely keeping us from doing the hardest of things. If I can’t smush a spider when I’m afraid, how in the world am I going to be able to tackle anything bigger than a spider? Fear wins that conversation if we let it.

Of all people...Jesus knows this about human nature. He has watched fear play out in a million different ways through his ministry. Peter slipping beneath the waves he had just been walking on. The scribes and Pharisees lobbing desperate questions about change and beliefs his way. The countless number of sick people kneeling before him in need of healing. Mary and Martha having to starkly confess their hurt because Lazarus was dead. His parents finding him in the Temple after he had wandered away from the group. He's seen it time and time again, the impacts fear can have on behavior and that it can have on belief, and so as he stands here with the disciples in our gospel this morning, all those things he knows about fear absolutely have to come into play.

In Matthew's gospel this is the last bit of teaching that Jesus does with the disciples before that Holy Week ball starts rolling downhill. Time is short and absolutely of the essence and so Jesus finally has to just break down the last few things he wants to say and put them in out there for the hard truths that they are. Imagine being in Jesus' shoes here, you've had three years with these guys, you know them deeply and completely, and you know what the coming days will bring for them. Jesus knows how each of them is going to react to the fear, the grief, the uncertainty, the massive heap

of responsibility that is going to be placed at their feet, but now is not the time for coddling or mincing words and so he gives them one last parable.

You have these three men entrusted with a massive amount of money, no matter which way you spin it. One talent is the equivalent of about sixteen years of salary, so even the man given one talent is still in charge of a *ton* of money. They've all had something huge placed in their hands, each according to their ability. And if this were a real life scenario, not a parable, you can imagine the thought process of these men as they hold this money in their hands. What if I lose it? What do I do with this? I've never seen this much money in my life! Why did he trust me with this? Where in the world do I even start? This could go horribly, horribly wrong... I mean maybe there's a tinge of excitement, but there's probably *a lot* of fear. Am I capable of doing what he clearly thinks I'm capable of doing? Is this really what my ability level is?

We see those thought processes play out in vastly different ways between these fellas as they seek to deal with what has been placed in their hands. Two of them don't let the fear dictate their capabilities. They take the risk and they go out and they do what they can with it, they make it more, and by doing so, they're given more responsibility. The other...the other gets into a me and Hairy the spider like stare down with this money,

and the fear wins, and suddenly his talent is scuttled away in a hidey hole just like that spider scurried away under my fridge. He claims it's about fear of what the master will do, but neither of the other two seem concerned about that and so you have to wonder...is that a really convenient excuse for his own fear of what he is capable of? Of what he's called to.

Jesus tells this parable to the disciples, knowing full well what he is about to place in their hands. The future of the faith, the future of any possible church, the message of the resurrection, the continuation of his ministry. Each according to their ability, they will have a part in that. And he knows, looking at them, that some of them are going to go all out with it, fight the fear, and do all they can. It'll take some work, but they'll do it, and there are others of them, who are going to stand frozen trying to figure out what to do, and all they'll end up doing is burying themselves in the sand, their gifts in the sand, and the fear will win. They won't think they are capable of anything other than hiding. Jesus is trying to get them to see as best he can that while what he is asking of them is intimidating and hard and *a lot*, they can do amazing things with it...if they don't let the fear win.

For as much as this is true of the disciples, the same is true for us. It can feel like so much has been given over into our hands. How faith gets lived out in the world, how the mission of the church gets described and

striven for, how the church is going to walk through the depth of social issues that we have facing this world, how the promise of the resurrection gets manifested and lived out by us ourselves and by us the church writ large. Sometimes we may even feel like the very future of the church itself rests in our hands, and when faced with all of those things, the natural response is to be scared, to be intimidated, to look at all of those huge things and go I am not equipped for that, that is not my thing, I am not capable and so I am just going to sit here, frozen, and operate in my own little bubble.

Yet, sitting frozen, standing still, that's not what we were called to. Imagine if the disciples had hunkered in. If they had sat in that locked room after Mary delivered them the news of the resurrection, and just said, guys, the world will eat us alive if we try to live this out without Jesus. We had a great run, three years that will mean a lot to each of us, and we'll keep that to ourselves. The whole world would be different. Imagine if we as the church stop, if we give in to the fear of the things we're facing or trying to tackle. Imagine if we looked at ourselves and said, we're just not capable of dealing with this. What might the world lose, what might *we* lose if we just stop trying, if we let the fear win?

I know that some of these things we're facing...declining church numbers, finding a voice in the midst of a cacophony of voices, speaking out

against injustice, striving to figure out just what our voice, our mission, our ministry even is in the world we live in. And none of that is easy. Each of us individually has a ton to figure out when it comes to how we're called to live out our faith before we even tackle who we are as a church together in the face of all of those things. But the question is, are we going to try and figure it out, are we going to try and tackle those things? We think so often that we are not capable of doing things we're afraid of, that seem hard, that seem insurmountable, and yet the reality is...we're not asked to do things we're unable to do. I know it sounds cliché and a little corny, but it's true. We can do hard things. Hard things are actually what make for great things, it just means we have to work at them a little bit. Building the church from the ground up wasn't easy, but here we are, because the disciples dared to live unafraid.

The truth of the matter is, I could have killed that spider. Quickly. I was fully capable, but I convinced myself that I wasn't. The truth of the matter is, we are a church, we are a people capable of incredible things because of the gifts that have been placed in our hands. It doesn't mean those things won't be hard or uncomfortable, but we can do them. We have to stop convincing ourselves that we're incapable. We could hide beneath the fridge, but we are capable of so much more. **AMEN!!!**