

Daily View

“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’” Hebrews 3:13

March 30, 2020

How Joshua Chamberlain Handled Fear

Many years ago, Christie and I visited Gettysburg. I had read about, and was inspired by, Joshua Chamberlain's heroic charge down the hill at Little Round Top which helped turn the tide of the battle of Gettysburg and the entire war, so I was excited to get to see the site. Chamberlain's troops were out of ammunition, the battle line was breached, and his men were exhausted and outnumbered by a relentless southern army that wouldn't quit. The situation was genuinely dire. Facing incredible odds, Chamberlain made a fateful decision. He ordered his men to “fix bayonets” and led the charge down the hill toward the southern troops. The confederates were so shocked that they hastily retreated, and Chamberlain's 20th Maine regiment won an unlikely but momentous battle.

Chamberlain was not a career army man; he was a mild-mannered professor at Bowdoin College in Maine and joined the army because he felt it was his duty. We can only imagine how fearful he must have been when facing a relentless and determined enemy. Yet, he didn't allow his fear to paralyze him.

[I took the photo – on something called “film” – at Little Round Top and then made a composite with a picture of Chamberlain to try to give the sense of what happened there. The photo is not that great, but you get the idea.]



Fear

Chamberlain faced an enemy that was right in front of him, in a life or death situation. There was no doubt about the danger. We are fighting a war against an “invisible enemy.” We can't see, we can't charge down a hill to defeat it; we just have to wait. And waiting is really hard. But, we get some help from God's word. Psalm 37 says, three times, “Fret not yourself..” In Ecclesiastes 1:18, Solomon said, “For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.” One reason there is so much angst among people right now is because we hear too much and know too little. Coronavirus news is just about all of the news and the news is rarely good news — and it's hard to know what is true and what is not. We fret because we fear how it might affect us and our loved ones. It has created a sense of panic in many of us and has caused us to take precautions in a way that I have never experienced before. Fear (fretting) is always vexing and some are paralyzed by it. Media and social media fan the flames of fear and the days seem a little darker than usual, even when the sun is out.

I've done my share of “fretting” in my life. I'm somewhat of a germophobe now but I was a radical germophobe when I was 10 years old. If I overheard something on the news or while adults were talking, it would frighten me. I was terrified of getting lockjaw (tetanus) so when I stepped on a rusty nail I knew I was done for. Then I heard the word “botulism” and I just knew all the food in the house was infected with the deadly bacteria. That came to a head one day when my mom was warming up some soup on the stove and walked out of the room for a minute; I walked in, saw the soup and thought it had been sitting there for a day or more and I threw it out. My mother never let me live that one down.

Some of my early fears were fueled by well-meaning adults who like to kid around but didn't realize how seriously kids take what adults say, even things they say in jest. I remember an older man at church saying that if you are bit by a gila monster “it won't let go until it thunders.” Living in sunny California, where thunder is rare, that still sent shivers down my spine and I spent the next few months looking for and avoiding gila monsters — in Orange County, of all places.

Fear is natural but gets you nowhere. FDR was right: “the only thing to fear is fear itself.” Better: “For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever. He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord.” (Psalm 112:6-7). As Christians, we shouldn't be afraid of bad news. After all, what's the worst thing that can happen? *A: We could die.* But we expose ourselves to the risk of death every day — there are lots of deadly diseases, and risks in travel that far exceed the risk we face with this current disease. Some of you do crazy things that increase the risk. We all live our lives in spite of that, without fear. Jesus died to “deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Hebrews 2:15). So what have we to fear?

News

I'm sure you've heard that the President has extended the social distancing guideline to April 30th. We know the aim is to keep us safe, so we accept it, but we don't like it. I miss seeing everyone twice a week, as I'm sure you all do. Meanwhile, it's important that remember our brothers and sisters who work in the health services field. They don't have the option of socially distancing themselves since they are charged with caring for patients who are sick. There are doctors, nurses and others who are at risk (I would name them, but you know who they are and I don't want to leave anyone out). Pray each day for the safety of these brothers and sisters who are on the frontlines during this trying time. **dp**

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