

What a week it has been in our town
and in Nashville and beyond.

In our lore, the ice of 2026 will become the
new storm of '94 for a generation in the years to come.

Most of us lost power for a few hours,
if not for days, like some of you did.

And there are many still without power across the Nashville area.

And it quickly became a fearful and anxious time
for many as the effects of all that ice dragged on.

We knew it was coming. Some doubted.

Some prepared. But no one was really ready.

So when we lost power on Sunday, at first, were you thinking,

" What are we going to do.

Is this temporary or what if it is longer???

What about our refrigerator?

What about heat?

What happens when it gets dark?

What lights do we have?

Did you resist the urge to open your refrigerator
or walk into a room that was dark and, in reflex,
turn on the light switch, expecting it to happen as I did?

And have to remember there is a reason why
nothing is on in the house.

I even tried the garage door... not once, but twice.

And perhaps we didn't feel safe and sheltered,
wondering when the next branch would
come down or what was next.

And remembered in a real way that the world
outside our doors is a dangerous place.

And where do we find our place in a dangerous world,

A place of strength, security, and safety?

Can we now breathe a sigh of relief, regardless of
what happens in the days and years ahead?

Or do we feel we have stepped closer to the abyss
when we look at what is happening
around us in our country and the world?

Have we turned our backs on unity and progress
for a nation of division and oppression,
suspicious of the other, and fear of the unknown?

Have we elevated personal choice to such a level
that there is nothing that unites us anymore,

and it's every soul for themselves;
some will make it and some won't, and that's just the way it is?

Well, maybe neither.
It is sort of like the weather in Middle Tennessee.
Always something different.
Usually, it probably won't be as bad as some think,
but it likely won't be as good as others think.
The same goes for the future.
The glorious future of our great nation. Any nation.
There are both hopes and fears.
That seems the way of things.
Maybe focusing too much on hope
sets us up for failure and disappointment.

That seems to be the feeling of many
who wanted change in Isaiah 9 and our day,
and the call for change seemed to be based on fear,
which is understandable, to a degree,
in every political campaign, then and now.
Fear is a powerful motivator.
People will respond out of fear,
will rise up out of fear,
will demand change because of fear.
The question is, "Are we still being led by fear and those who stoke our fears?
Or is it time to find something else upon which to build our tomorrow?"

Psalm 27 starts.. **The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?**

The psalmist knows trouble.
If the psalmist is David, as some traditions have it,
then he indeed knows trouble.
Threatened by enemies and loved ones alike,
he was loved and despised in turn,
filled up with God's presence, and then seemingly
abandoned by God because of his arrogance and self-conceit.

He knew what it was to fear.
He knew what it was to want to hide.
But David's secret power was that whenever
he found himself in trouble,
he turned to repentance and humility.
Then he sought redemption from the only source who could calm his fears.

It wasn't his strength, his self-dependence,
or flexing his own muscles that brought him comfort.
"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?"
Whom indeed? You want a list?
Because I can find a list.
There are plenty of things in life, I fear.
I have a fear of heights, and most of you know
I have an aversion to needles,
which has plagued me my entire life.
What about you?
There are plenty out there who will
itemize the fears we need to embrace.
It is the way of the world.

And while we live in and embrace the world,
we don't live by the ways of the world.
We are called to live differently.
We are called to live confidently.
We are called to be bearers of the light—
the light of hope and confidence,
the light of faith and transformation.
We hear it in the familiar passage from Isaiah 9:2

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-on them light has shined

We have seen that light and received that light.
Now it is our job to carry that light.
We do not fear the darkness because
our God has overcome it in Jesus.
Our houses might go dark,
but our hearts must never give in to the darkness.

Have you noticed that in scripture,
the opposite of faith is not doubt?
Doubt seems to be widespread in the Bible.
Doubt seems to coexist with faith.

Remember the prayer of the desperate father in Mark Chapter 9?

"Lord, I believe, help my unbelief."
Jesus doesn't reprimand this poor man.
Belief and unbelief often sit side by side.
That belief without unbelief, without a measure of doubt,
turns into an activist's arrogance,
into those who believe themselves incapable of error.
A certain amount of doubt gives us the right

amount of humility to be effective
instruments of God's grace in the world.
I have mentioned before 4 words that help me
to understand someone's perspective,
even if I don't agree with it.
What are those 4 words? I might be wrong.

No, in the Bible, you know the opposite of faith isn't doubt.

Do you know what is? It is fear.

Throughout the Bible, what are they not supposed to do?

The call is to not fear.

Angels said it every time they showed up.

God proclaimed it. Jesus lived it.

Paul talked about it.

John put it on a bumper sticker for us
to cling to when things get shaky.

Perfect love casts out fear.

Perfect love, the love that comes from Christ, casts out fear.

There is no room for fear when we are filled with love.

You can't get rid of fear with wisdom.

You can't argue people out of fear.

Would you show up at your child's bedroom door
in the middle of the night and say,

"Now Jeremy, you know there are no such
things as monsters under your bed.

Being afraid in the darkness is simply illogical.

Just get over it, Jeremy.

No, that won't work, and I didn't do that to Hannah,

and my parents didn't do that to me,

and it sounds odd for any parent to do right?

Instead, what do we do?

We step in, rush in at times, and gather our

child up in our arms, hold them close,

and remind them that they are loved—

powerfully, completely, unconditionally loved.

That's how we handle fear with complete love.

The psalmist says the same thing.

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble,

the psalmist says; and he will seek to conceal me

under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

Hide in God and be lifted up, above our fears, stable on that rock.

Then, we're told, worship with joy: shouts of joy;

Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD

Not sitting in the pew while the worship show goes on
but shouting with joy while we make sacrifices.

Since the blood of Christ has already
been spilled once and for all, instead,
let's sacrifice our pride, our stiffness, our standoffishness.

Let's sacrifice our "you first" or "me first" attitude
and offer a hand to someone else, someone not like us.

That is our attitude adjustment here.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt said one of his most
famous quotes delivered during his first
inaugural address on a rainy day in March 1933.

Addressing a nation paralyzed by the Great Depression,
he urged Americans to embrace confidence,
action, and national unity over despair.

So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless,
unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance".

Let's act like we really have nothing to fear but fear itself.

You have probably experienced that
this week or seen it in some way.
Neighbors helping neighbors' stories everywhere.

In the midst of fear of the unknown,
people showing up in love and supporting us
and providing security and safety and shelter.
Lipscomb...here at NFUMC...

So, you're thinking, "Ok PJ, I like the sound of that,
that living without fear kind of thing. But how?"

I mean, I hear the calls to be afraid.

There are lots of things to fear.

Our world is falling apart.

Making fear choices seems to be the smarter way to go.

Acting out of fear seems the logical response.

So, how do we get where we can live without fear?

The psalmist is with you and me.

Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me!

He needs a little psalm pep talk to get where
his theology tells him he needs to be,

even if his guts won't let him.

Luckily, he slipped his inner dialogue right into the psalm.

"Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, LORD, do I seek.

You want to overcome fear?

Seek God's face. Seriously.

This isn't a platitude to make you feel better.

It is a program for ridding yourself and the world of fear.

Seek God's face.

Set yourself the task of looking for God at work in the world.

We claim to believe God is at work among us;

we claim to believe God is at work within us.

So, look. Look for God's face in the face of the

stranger serving you lunch,

working on your car,

or even asking for a handout.

Look for God's face in the gestures of kindness

in this terrible world, in the opportunities to laugh and sing,

in the moments of grace with loved ones

even if you were sitting in the dark.

Seek God's face in the beauty of music,

in the wonder of the world around you.

**Have you ever noticed that when you are
focused on helping other people,**

you don't dwell on your own problems and fears as much?

You and I are on a mission.

If you fill up your life with the search for God,

you won't have time to fear.

Let me see your face, O God, my light and my salvation!

Then, without fear, you will be carrying the light in how you live every day.

How can you carry the light in the week ahead?