

One of my favorite singer-songwriters of the '70s and early '80s was Jackson Browne. Any Jackson Browne fans out there? My favorite album was his fifth, **Running on Empty**. Browne had a devastating year in 1976. His wife, model Phyllis Major, had taken her own life, leaving Browne to raise their toddler son alone. You probably know some of the lyrics to the title song

Running on, running on empty  
Running on, running blind  
Running on, running into the sun  
But I'm running behind  
Gotta do what you can just to keep your love alive  
Trying not to confuse it with what you do to survive  
In sixty-nine, I was twenty-one, and I called the road my own  
I don't know when that road turned into the road I'm on

Those lyrics have spoken to me at different times in my life with the unexpected twists and turns and curves that have happened. And now, closer to 60 than 50, I often think about where my life has been And where my life is going.

When we feel like in our lives we are running on empty, just out of gas, thoughts are running through our mind like, "I don't know whether I can go on. I'm at the end of my rope. I'm ready to throw in the towel. Have you ever been just empty?"

**The followers of Jesus were just empty.**

Imagine your best friend was just murdered - executed, in fact. You could have helped him escape, but you ran instead. You're angry and disappointed, not only in yourself, but in your friend. He said he could handle it. He said he was big enough to avoid it. He said he was God. Or at least, that's what you heard.

And you are scared.  
People know who you are.  
You witnessed his "crimes" and

you know you were an accomplice.  
You are thinking to yourself,  
“How am I going to get out of this?  
How am I going to get out of town?”  
Your hopes have been dashed and  
a once bright future is now very dark.  
And that is where our story begins...

**19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders,**

Let's paint the scene...  
The doors are locked. The room is dim.  
There is a low murmur of voices in the background  
as you sit in a corner and review your own role  
in the horrible death of your best friend.  
But you are also mourning...  
In the Jewish tradition, when a member of the family died  
It required a seven-day ritualized  
formal mourning period before the family  
would scatter and go their separate ways.  
And I think it is interesting that it was  
during this time of sitting shivah, when Jesus appeared.

Probably all of us have been sitting in  
A shut-off shut-down space at some point in our life.  
We have let ourselves down, we have failed our friends,  
and Lord knows we have betrayed our God  
with our brokenness and our actions.  
We see our own failings,  
we know our own hearts and  
we become very good at beating up on ourselves.  
I imagine all kinds of things as I envision  
that room on the evening of the day  
the disciples discovered that  
not only was their Master dead,  
but the tomb was empty.

But that leaves me with questions  
I wonder, “What would you see in that room?  
What do you see after betrayal, after disappointment? After mourning?  
What do you see “after”? I'll tell you what I see.  
I immediately see **“Fear.”**  
Fear colors the scene, as Jesus' followers have

secured themselves from the authorities  
It is very obvious and real –  
the disciples are scared of the Jews,  
according to John and the doors are locked.  
After disappointment and betrayal, there is fear.

Luke adds 36 **While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”** 37 **They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.**

Fear is something that we have all had to deal with.  
Most of you know I have a fear of heights and avid fear of needles... ( the escalator at Lucas Oil)  
Someone said “The oldest and strongest emotion of humankind is fear,”  
and fear makes you do things you would normally not do.  
Where does FEAR come from?  
It actually is self-generated based on  
our interpretations of what we see.  
A simple acrostic for fear is this: **False Evidence Appearing Real.**

Fear was real for them, and it is real for us.  
And most of the time, it comes because  
we do not understand what we are seeing.  
They are human. They did not understand.  
They were afraid of being locked up and crucified.  
They were afraid of the Jews.

I tend to agree with the writer who said,  
“The first thing that is imperative to understand and accept is ...  
The more you resist fear, and try to directly overcome it, the stronger it gets.  
The more attention you give it, the more it grows.”

**Yesterday, I tried to resist my fear of heights and overcome it**  
so I could put some new gutter guards in at the parsonage.  
The lower ones were as easy as pie.  
But as they became progressively higher, my fear also increased.  
The last two are the highest points of the house, and we sit on a hill.  
As I climbed rung after rung to the top,  
I realized it wasn't going to happen.

And so as we begin to wrestle with what to do  
with the empty tomb and the elusive voice of Jesus  
I think we have to ask the question  
**how can you be faithful while you are fearful?**

Well, we can be faithful because not only do I see fear in that room,  
after fear I see **forgiveness**.

I see forgiveness demonstrated by the  
first words out of Jesus' mouth when he entered the room in both Luke and John.

**19 Jesus came and stood among them. He said,  
"Peace be with you!"**

Not "Where were you guys?"

Not "How could you have let me down?"

But "Calm down guys! Chill out!

Jesus had said earlier in John 14 that

he gives peace, not "as the world gives" ;

This is true Shalom in the Hebrew sense.

he gives peace that provides solace in the face of persecution,

a promise of new possibilities,

and confidence in his ability to overcome "the world".

Take a deep breath. Relax. It's going to be ok.

I've got it all under control."

Forgiveness from the start.

Jesus shows them His love and that is not all.

**20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the  
Lord, they were filled with joy.**

When Jesus shows the disciples the

nail prints in his hands and feet,

he's not only identifying Himself,

He's showing how much He loves them.

No one will ever love you like this, but Jesus does.

Luke goes even further...

He even offered to let them touch him.

**38 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at  
my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and  
bones, as you see I have."40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.**

And if that was not enough, he decided

to raid the fridge while he was there...

I mean, a guy's got to eat...

even resurrected ones...

**41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do  
you have anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it  
and ate it in their presence.**

And so the elusive voice of Jesus has finally arrived.  
These disciples had finally believed in  
both the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

And you know what? God fills you and me with  
God's presence when we are running on empty,  
when we are afraid. Jesus said I don't want to just be with you.  
I want to be living within you.

And finally, after the fear, and after the forgiveness in that room,  
I see something else that makes all the difference.  
And what is that? **faith**.

Because sometimes you need  
forgiveness before you can find faith.  
I see faith restored.  
Into that room walked someone they  
thought they would never see again.  
Hope sprang forth fresh from the darkness of their hearts.  
They witnessed in person the Living Lord, and rejoiced.  
Their faith was restored.  
They were changed by Jesus's amazing grace.  
The Gospel of John shows us that  
there are different kinds of faith,  
and that faith comes in different ways  
and with differing intensities to different people.

In verse 8 of this same chapter,  
the beloved disciple John believes  
when he sees the empty tomb.  
In verse 16, Mary believes when the Lord calls her name.  
The disciples here in verse 20 actually see the risen Lord.  
And I see faith shared.  
The disciples, in turn, witnessed to Thomas,  
and we will see his encounter next week.  
When Jesus had died, the Disciples had lost all hope.

I have found in my life that nothing  
drains my tank more than a lack of hope.  
The last thing Jesus did with His followers  
on that very first Easter was to give them, and you and me hope.  
Despite all their doubts and fears,  
Jesus gave them hope in themselves and in God.

Jesus invites faith in himself, but realizing

that we have fear does so with an elusive voice of gentleness,  
of kindness, recognizing our need for evidence,  
and then blessing us with greater faith.  
He does not condemn, nor does he resort to name-calling.  
He invites us to know him even when we are fearful.

**This story tells us that when you're running on empty,**

Jesus doesn't wait for you to come to Him.

He comes to you.

He takes the initiative and goes to where you are.

Amid our fear, self-doubt, and questioning, Jesus shows up.

Even on a ladder.

If you're feeling frustrated, fatigued, fearful, or just weary.

If you're sick and tired of being sick and tired –  
you've picked a good Sunday to come to church.

I've got good news for you:

There's an answer available to you.

**No matter where you are,**  $\frac{3}{4}$  full,  $\frac{1}{2}$  empty,

$\frac{1}{4}$  full or the 'e' light is on in your life, you need to fill up.

When you're running on empty,

it can feel like God's a million miles away.

But have you ever noticed what many car passenger side mirrors say?

Objects may be closer than they appear.

When you are running on empty

God's closer than you, and I realize.

God's here, and God's near, and God wants to help you today.

How can you be faithful when you are fearful?

**Well the great motivational speaker Zig Ziglar**

**Said that FEAR has two meanings:**

Forget everything and Run OR

Face everything and Rise.

The choice is yours.

And we can be faithful because there is not only fear

in that room, but also forgiveness and most importantly, faith.

Faith that Jesus will do what he says he will do and

that he will appear to us and walk with us when we are afraid.

And that his peaceful voice is not so elusive

If we are listening for it, not with fear but with faith.

And that voice will bring us peace if we let him in.

Will you forget everything and run?

OR will you face everything and rise?