

“That Dreaded Card”

Matthew 6:25-34

Series: Launch – Week 5. Launched to Live Fearlessly

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Well the day final came. 50 years. Half a century. I still can't believe it. To honor me my family decided to put on moustaches...even one on baby Ben. My wife took me a way for a few days and even let me eat crabs...although one tried to eat me. There was cake and, of course, cards. Most of them were kind, sweet and even spiritual. Most of them. But not all. There were also those dreaded, “You're getting older” cards.

- You have vision, fortitude, and character. (on the inside) who needs hair?
- Don't sweat turning 50! (on the inside) Nobody likes a sweaty senior citizen.
- Rock n Roll Bands for folks your age: The Grateful we're not Dead, Earth Wind and Fiber (on the inside) Crosby, Stills, Nash and not so Young.
- The Classic Rock Way to Look at Turning 50 (on the inside) You're halfway up the stairway to heaven.

But mixed in among the Birthday cards that filled my mailbox was one that came in the plainest envelope with no markings whatsoever on it. After I opened it I knew why it came in this secret stealth packaging. I thought it was a bill, a credit card offer, an invitation to a five hour timeshare sales pitch. But no. It was that dreaded card. I ripped it open and screamed: Oh no. I just got my AARP card! When I told people I turned 50 they didn't ask, “Did you have a nice birthday?” but “Did you get your AARP card?”

What does AARP stand for? The American Association of Retired Persons? Nope. Not anymore. Now officially it just means AARP. Even they don't want to be associated with retire people. And what do you get for your \$16 a year membership?

20% off an orthopedic mattress at Sleepy's.

Discounts at Best Buy on an Ipad – the Iphone for the bifocal gang.

Free repairs at Pep Boys for a stuck left turn signal.

20% off when you have dinner at Old Country Buffet at 4 p.m.

Now I love my birthday. So what's wrong with crossing the fifty yard line of life? What's so dreadful about a little red and white AARP card in your mailbox? I guess it feels strange to hear someone call out, “Hey gramps” and they're talking to me. It feels weird to be more concerned about a retirement fund than a college fund. It's starting to hit me that I have more years behind me than ahead. Jesus said,

Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? (Matthew 6:27)

Okay Jesus. But does that mean I also don't have to add another year to my age? Can I just stay at 49? What Jesus? There is a way to stop adding years to my age? No. I don't want that. Thank you. I'll just keep going.

The church staff gave me a very nice card which said, "Each Day is a Gift from God." That is certainly true. But I guess you could also take that as a warning: "Don't take it for granted, buddy, you're living on borrowed time." That's also true. Every day is borrowed from God.

What if you only had today? What if today is your last day? I know that sounds like a very morbid thought. So let me state it more positively. What if you were to live today like there's no tomorrow? That simple question has the power to radically change everything. If this is your last day you wouldn't waste it watching the Kardashians or reading about someone's cat on Facebook. You'd stop putting in all that overtime because you'd basically be out of time. Sure, you'd want to put your financial affairs in order. But I doubt you would spend your last 24 hours playing angry birds. Isn't it strange how deadlines can change the decisions you make?

If this is your last day, I bet relationships would rise to the top of your list. You would want to see your loved ones one more time and say, "I'm sorry. I forgive you. I love you. Take care of him or her for me. Goodbye." When you read an obituary you rarely see a catalogue of the deceased's possessions or portfolios. They list the people they leave behind. When time is short, people become more valuable than possessions.

If this is your last day, I bet God would also become very important. I've had conversations about the Lord with people in hospital rooms and hospice facilities who did not seem very interested before. Some want to confess their sins. Most want reassurance there is a life beyond this one and there is a God who loves them.

God and people: those two relationships suddenly come into sharper focus when our final day approaches. Why does the thought of death make us finally discover what we should have been doing our whole life? Jesus laid it out in the simplest possible terms. The purpose of your life is this:

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commands. Matthew 22:37-40.

Loving God and loving people – what better way is there to spend your life? So why don't we do that today?

Because of one word: Tomorrow. Some live in yesterday. But more of us are so fixated on tomorrow we miss today. We are **Scared about Supplies**. We're afraid today we won't have enough stuff tomorrow. Jesus said,

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Matthew 6:25-26.

You know some people feed the birds. Not the Hoglunds. We are squirrel central. Some people have a bird feeder. We have a “squirrel snacker.” My wife gets after me if I don’t keep the squirrel snacker stocked. Among the squadron of squirrels which camps out at our house is a trio of black squirrels. We call them Blackie 1, 2, and 3. How can you tell which is which? Ask my wife. She knows. When I am at home my wife, a university professor with a Ph.D., will text me for updates on Blackie. Sometimes the grey squirrel mafia moves in. The Alpha squirrel, we call him Nutsy, will take over the squirrel snacker, chase away Blackies 1, 2 & 3, climb inside and consume every last corn kernel.

Now you may say, “It’s so poetic for Jesus to talk about God feeding the birds of the air and clothing the grass of the field with wildflowers but I don’t want to eat birdseed and wear lilies the rest of my life. And what do I do when the grey squirrels from the government, the mortgage company, the college tuition, the stock market, the heating fuel company and others consume all the cracked corn? I need to worry about this stuff.”

No you don’t. Work for this stuff? Yes. Jesus never tells us to stop working, sit back and wait for God to throw us some seed. Keep working. Stop worrying. Worry is worthless. Jesus says, “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” (Matthew 6:27). Worry does not add to your life. In fact, anxiety and stress take years off your life. Worry accomplishes nothing. “But I have to worry,” you say, “because it gives me something to do.” That comment says it all. Worry is our useless attempt to control something which is beyond our power.

The only solution to worry is faith. Jesus is not teaching us about little birds, seed, grass or lilies but little faith

If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Matthew 6:30.

If God pays such great attention to details like birds and grass, He can be trusted to take care of the bigger things. When we worry about tomorrow in essence we are saying to God, “I don’t think you can handle this one.” But He can. What’s more, He wants to. He’s not just Almighty God. Jesus says He’s also your heavenly Father. Trade in your worry for faith.

We also miss Today because we are **Scared about Scarcity**. Jesus continues,

So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ (Matthew 6:31)

Do you hear the fear in those questions? They are scared about scarcity – that there won't be enough. These days, to kill a new idea all someone has to do is say, "That's a great idea but you know how it is with the economy." They say it in business, in the home, in the schools and at church. We are prisoners of scarcity thinking. We think there are only three things left and if you take two I'm only left with one. What we don't realize is there are a hundred, a thousand, an endless supply of possibilities. The limits are not out there but in here – in our minds. What's more, we serve a God who is the source of all abundance. Paul says,

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:20)

Most of us would be happy if God would do what we ask or imagine. By His power at work within us, God can do immeasurably more.

Many pastors and churches today are prisoners of scarcity thinking. They say, "We are a small congregation with very few resources and mostly elderly members. We can't do much. We are just trying to keep our doors open." Then I invited them to join us for the Church Has Left the Building. I sent out over 150 invitations to pastors in Mercer, Bucks, Montgomery, Delaware and Philadelphia counties. And do you know what I heard from some of them, "We are a small congregation with very few resources and mostly elderly members. We can't do much. We are just trying to keep our doors open." And I said, "I understand. It's difficult these days. But while you're trying to keep your doors open do you think, with God's help, you could walk out of them and bless somebody in your neighborhood?"

Sixteen churches said, "Yes!" Next Sunday we will go out of our buildings and bless our communities. We will be collecting canned goods, preparing meals, leading worship in nursing homes and at the Salvation army, collecting furniture, honoring our Veterans, doing home repairs for neighbors in need and on and on. Let's say those seventeen churches did an average of nine mission projects each that's 153 different projects to bless the Delaware Valley. I don't know about you but that's more than I could ask or imagine. That has got to be a God thing! The Church of Jesus Christ is a sleeping giant. But when it wakes up – watch out. So will you join us? Will you sign up and get on board? Let's stop being scared of scarcity. Let's serve the God of abundance.

Lastly, we miss Today when we are **Scared about Security**. For the last six week you've been seeing LAUNCH videos by Gary LaSasso, Rodney Gayle and Dave Richards. They showed us how the new building is being fully used. When they turned to talk about the new satellite campus Greg Penza will launch they wanted to find the perfect location for a satellite launch. So Gary put on his space suit and went to the campus of aerospace corporation Lockheed Martin in Newtown. Gary writes,

I decided to shoot the “search for Captain Penza” outside of Lockheed. Well, unbeknownst to me, that is Government property. As I tried to leave the area outside Lockheed, a security truck raced in front of me and slammed on his brakes. I was ready to throw the car in reverse when an unmarked car boxed me in from behind. As I was being questioned by security pleading for my life, a scary man got out of the unmarked car and walked up behind me. In a stern voice, he said, “Step out of the vehicle and put your hands where I can see...Oh it’s you, you knucklehead.” That scary man was John Hughes. Whew. My life was spared.

It doesn’t end there. John Hughes writes,

When I got back to my control center the nuns at Holy Family College next door had called Lockheed and said a "crazy man" wearing an "aluminum suit" was standing in their driveway taking pictures. I called Sister Mary Katherine back and said that "aluminum man" was actually a good friend of mine and he was taking photos and wearing his "astronaut" gear to help raise money for our Church. She said which one and I said, “Woodside Presbyterian around the corner from the College.” She said she would pray for us.

I believe it was then Sister Mary Katherine whispered to John the magic word that would solve all our problems: Bingo.

Security is important. Underneath many of our decision and actions is a feeling of insecurity. We want to feel secure in our homes, in our jobs, in our families and our future, in the affection and approval of others. If we have money in the bank, if we have stuff in our homes we think we will be secure. So we run after all these things. But Jesus says we have it backwards.

For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.
Matthew 6:32-34

Do you see the twist? If you put stuff first, if you put tomorrow’s troubles first, you’ll miss out on God and people today. But if you first love God and love people, you also receive the stuff you need. Real security comes not from stuff but from putting God first.

If you put God first does that mean you need to push your family, your work, your school, your community, your hobbies and sports out of first place? No. It means you put God first *in* your family, you put God first *at* your work place and school, you put God first *in* your neighborhood and on the soccer field and everywhere else.

And that also means putting God first in your finances. I believe the majority of Christians want to give. You are generous people. The real question is the way we give. We are so afraid for our security we give from what we have left over. We don’t give to God first but last. We make sure everything else is covered before we give to God.

If you want to seek first God's kingdom, you will make a breakthrough when you put God first in your finances. The tithe, the first and best 10% of all one has was given to the Temple, where you worshiped. Some of it supported the ministry of the priests and Levites, some of it went to feed the poor, the widow and the orphan, some of it was burned up on the altar as an act of praise to God. None of it went to build the Temple. That offering was over and above the tithe. And charitable giving was even beyond that. That's the Biblical principle we follow in our house. That is one of the ways we seek God's kingdom first and trust that all our other needs will be provided one day at a time.

One of the few state sanctioned religious expressions left appears, of all places, on our money: "In God We Trust." Today, when you fill out these two commitment cards, it will be an act of trust in God. You will make a decision to seek first God's kingdom. Take the step up to tithing or beyond tithing. Trust in the God who is your only security in life and death, the God overcomes scarcity, the God who supplies all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)

Charlie Duke had every reason to feel secure. He had the right stuff. He was an Air Force test pilot, a graduate of MIT, and later a Brigadier General. When Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the moon, Charlie Duke was the guy on the other end of the line at NASA. Three years later he became the tenth person to walk on the moon on Apollo 16. He still holds the record for the most hours – 72 – on the moon. But he soon found that even the moon was not enough. Charlie Duke writes,

What can top 11 days in space and 3 days trekking around the moon? I was 36, with a successful military career behind me, and I began to wonder, "What now?" I was bored. Fame, fortune, a spot in the history books: I had it all. But if you were a fly on the wall in my home, you would have seen that I wasn't so hot. I was failing miserably as a husband and father. But instead of addressing my problems, I took my eyes off the moon and put them on money. Surely, I reasoned, that would bring the satisfaction even the moon had failed to deliver.

Marriage certainly hadn't delivered any satisfaction. Within a few years Dottie and I were heading full-speed toward divorce. There were a lot of good-looking women in the world, and a lot of them liked astronauts. I hoped Dottie would decide to leave me. Instead, she told me she was depressed and thinking about suicide.

About that time, our church hosted a "spiritual renewal weekend," and we attended. While Dottie was engrossed in the testimonies of how Christ changed people's lives, my mind was on the million-and-a-half dollars I'd just borrowed from the bank for my new business. I figured it better work or I'd be in trouble. My money worries drowned out most of what I heard at the weekend seminar.

Though I had gone to church all my life, I wasn't looking for God. I knew Jesus the way you know the United States presidents—in name only. Sure enough, my

business succeeded. The money rolled in. After six months, I sold out at a handsome profit. Again I was bored.

But Dottie wasn't. She had changed. Her depression lifted, and she demonstrated a new, believing faith. She turned to God—not me—for answers to her problems. It was appealing, and our marriage improved. One night we attended a Bible study that focused on one penetrating question: Who was Jesus? All my life I had said the words, 'the Son of God,' but I had never thought about it in a deep way. That night I came face-to-face with the option of following Him. I prayed with Dottie in the front seat of our car and gave my life over to Christ.

I didn't see angels. Didn't hear music. No blinding lights. But I knew what I knew. It was real. The next day, I awoke with an insatiable desire to read the Bible. I had a lot of mending to do. I asked God, Dottie and my sons to forgive me. I asked God for the strength to love my wife. My love for her grows daily. I'm more in love with Dottie today than (the day we married). God also graciously restored my relationship with my sons.

Watching God heal our family and pull us off the road to divorce has been true adventure. It cost the government \$400 million for me to walk three days on the moon—and it's over. But to walk with Jesus is free, and it lasts forever.¹

Walk with Jesus, let Him lead the way.

¹ <http://www.lovehalifax.com/changed/cduke.html>.