

Running in the Dark  
2 Kings 6:8-17, 1 John 4:1-6  
The First United Presbyterian Church of Crafton Heights  
August 26, 2007  
Pastor Dave Carver

It's great to be back at home, and as I begin my message today, I want to say thanks to everyone who has held me and the family in your prayers as we have traveled. It's been a long time since I've been around, and I'm grateful for your support and encouragement.

In case you were not here when we got back from the mission trip, you might have missed the fact that I've been limping since the night of August 4<sup>th</sup>. That Thursday evening, the youth group was engrossed in a compelling game of "Ghost Adios", and I was running as fast as I could, in the dark, away from Nate Akrie. I was making a beeline for the porch of our cabin, which was home base, where I'd be safe.

Now you might ask me, "Why, Dave? Why were you running? What could possibly compel you to run full tilt, in the dark, alone, in unfamiliar surroundings?"

Because, I say, Nate was IT. He is faster, more agile, younger than I. And if he caught me, then I'd be IT. As you already know, I don't want to be IT. I want to be Dave.

Since August 4<sup>th</sup>, when people ask me why I'm limping, I smile and say, "Well, I was running in the dark and I stepped in a hole". And almost always, you look at me as if I'm nuts, and you barely stop yourself from saying, "What kind of an idiot – especially a 47 year old idiot whose best healing days are behind him – runs in the dark?"

And my reply, at least outwardly, is what I hope is a kind of an "aw, shucks" boyish grin that I hope you'll come to love...

But inwardly, I want to say, "Who are YOU to be lecturing ME about running in the dark! As if YOU'VE never done it!" It seems to me as though much of our lives we are either running in the darkness or fighting the urge to do the same. And, if you and I were being completely honest with each other, you could confess that you, too, are limping – but that we can't see your ace bandage.

What do I mean by this? Listen:

I was sitting in the front yard with my friend Scott. He held the phone, and had just ended a conversation with his insurance company. They had called to tell him that they had just received a confirmation from the Doctor's office that he was, indeed, suffering from Amyloidosis – the rare and generally fatal disease that took the lives of Pittsburgh Mayor Caliguri and Pennsylvania Governor

Casey some years ago. The insurance company was calling to tell Scott that they were withholding any further payment for treatment other than pain management because, in his case, such health benefits were not “cost effective” for the company.

Mike is leaving home for the first time in his life. He’s starting college, which will mean a new schedule, some new duties and responsibilities and a new routine, all in a new city with no friends or family to back him up.

Ellen was laid off from her job. She has bills to pay, and is uncertain where the next mortgage payment will come from. Worse than that, she senses, is the fact that she has entered into a period of depression, where she feels the blackness of despair hounding her every move. She doesn’t know what to do or where to turn.

Tina was out of options. She and her mother had had it out, again. Harsh and hateful words were spit out at each other – words that one or the other thought that they might not really mean, but what if it was true? What if she was unloved? What if she was unlovable?

Sean didn’t know what to do. His wife had been deployed to Iraq, and it would be six months before they saw each other again. How was he supposed to take care of the kids, the house, and the bills...by himself? He was frightened.

Have I made my point? Do you see yourself in any of these stories? Have you ever been running in the dark – feeling alone, desperate, hoping to reach base before your life dissolved into nothingness?

You see, it’s not just knuckleheaded pastors who run in the dark. It’s you, too, isn’t it?

Why? Why do we run blindly in the darkness?

Because “IT” is chasing us. And this time, “IT” is not Nate Akrie or some other fun-loving Langley teen who will help us if we do fall. “IT” is illness, or poverty, or fear, or loneliness. And you know what it is like to be afraid of these things. And when you are running in the dark, fleeing these fears, you panic. You hear a noise, you sense a movement, and each new instant brings new opportunities for dread.

You heard the scriptures a few moments ago. Maybe you knew the story of Elisha, maybe not. He was in a tight spot. The King of Syria was sending these raiding parties into Israel, and Elisha, by means of prophecy, was able to thwart his plans and save Israelites. As you heard, this didn’t sit well with the king of Syria, and so he sent out a party to capture the prophet. And one morning, his young attendant looks outside the tent and brings the alarming news that they are surrounded by bloodthirsty Syrians. There appears to be no escape. He says, “Look out there! We are toast! We are surrounded by the

army of Syria on horse and chariot!” You can’t get the grammar quite right in English, but the lad is using words for “horse” and “chariot” that are collective single nouns – an army with “horse” and with “chariot”. It’s a frightening scenario – a huge horse, a huge chariot. He himself might not be sure what he’s saying – he’s panicked. It’s time to run.

Elisha prays and suggests that Junior take another look outside the tent. And when he does, he looks past the Syrian army and sees that the hills are filled with the horses and chariots of God – this time, in the plural. More powerful than the “horse” and “chariot” of Syria. Elisha is cool as a cucumber, and shows the boy that protection is at hand, and they are, in fact, spared.

Writing in the New Testament, John makes much the same point. “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world...” These are words of great comfort and hope to me, and I hope to you as well.

So what is your point, Pastor?

Let me put it this way: Running in the dark is a time-honored strategy. Ever since our earliest ancestors *almost* killed the scary animal with a sharp stick, running like crazy has come in very handy. It’s a useful ploy, not only for games of tag, but for any time when you are panicked, or powerless, or alone, or being stalked by some kind of threatening “IT”. If you find yourself in that spot, then run!

The thing is, though, that I don’t know too many Christians who are in that position. I mean, if what the Bible says is true, and if Jesus is who he says he is...

As a Christian, you know who you are. You know *whose* you are. You have God’s word for it in Romans 8 and a dozen other places in the Bible that there is nothing on this earth that can separate you from the power of his love in Jesus Christ. Nothing. There is no “IT” that is stronger, bigger, faster than God. And if that is true, then there is no reason to panic, no reason to run in the dark. Instead, Christians are called to keep our eyes on home base and to move in that direction knowing that we are safe from the powers of “IT”.

And you say, “Sure, Pastor Dave, that sounds nice, but what happens when things don’t work out. I’m pretty sure you told us that story of Scott before, and he died, didn’t he? Bad things happen, don’t they?”

You bet they do.

The message of scripture is NOT that once we believe in Jesus Christ, that nothing bad will ever happen to us.

The message of Scripture is that no bad thing is bigger than Jesus Christ. No permanent – no eternal – harm can come to anyone who trusts and follows Jesus of Nazareth. And so Scott, by the end of the day, did not see himself as

someone who was panicked and fleeing amyloidosis; he saw himself as someone who as striding confidently towards Jesus.

Are you alone? Afraid? Even panicked? I know that some of you are. I know that. Ask God to show you himself. Ask God to open your eyes. I'm not trying to be corny, I'm just asking you to ask God to treat you the same way that he treated that unnamed teenage boy in 2 Kings. Ask God to show you where help is. Ask God to remind you where home base is. And then, one step at a time, move in that direction. You will get there. And when you do, you won't be limping as much as I have been. God bless you. Amen.