Hi,

The skies may be darkening today, but let’s try to keep our spirits up. It would be a good day to reach out to a friend or two, just to say hello and remind ourselves that everyone else is still out there . . . really.

Here’s a few updates:

* We will have a full line-up of Holy Week services on-line, beginning Palm Sunday. You can participate at [www.standrewumc.org](http://www.standrewumc.org) and [Facebook Live](https://www.facebook.com/pg/StAndrewUnitedMethodistChurch/posts/?ref=page_internal).
* We invite you to download the EasterNow app and journey together as a church family through Holy Week towards the cross of Good Friday and the celebration of Easter Sunday. Experience the events of Holy Week in real time through the convenience of your phone. [Click here for more information on the app and all of the Holy Week worship times](https://www.standrewumc.org/news/holyweek).
* **My Sunday class will begin meeting this weekend, at noon**, not 11am. It will be on [my Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle), just like the weekday classes that have met the last two weeks. You do not need a Facebook account to view the class, but you will need an account to comment. Just follow the link to my page. If you and I are not friends on Facebook, just send me a friend request and we will be. We will be walking through Holy Week in the class, with lots of maps and photos.
* The links to the on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/). This week’s videos and podcasts are all uploaded.

It would be easy for our fears and anxieties to overwhelm us in this crisis. But we are people of faith and we put our trust in Christ. What does that trust look like in practice? Here’s a couple of stories:

***Numbers 13:30-14:4 (NRSV)***

**But Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, “Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.” Then the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we.” So they brought to the Israelites an unfavorable report of the land that they had spied out, saying, “The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size. There we saw the Nephilim (the Anakites come from the Nephilim); and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.”**

**Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. And all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become booty; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?” So they said to one another, “Let us choose a captain, and go back to Egypt.”**

***Luke 8:22-25 (NRSV)***

**One day he [Jesus] got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they put out, and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, “Where is your faith?” They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?”**

The unknown. If we stop to think about it, our lives are pretty much one large pile of unknowns. We take risks of one sort or another every day of our lives. Most of these unknowns don’t trouble us at all and if they do, we deal with them easily. But sometimes, we face an unknown that terrifies us, paralyzes us, and robs of us whatever peace of mind we might have enjoyed. Such an unknown can cause us to make terrible decisions.

*Trust or turn back?*

Today’s passage from the book of Numbers tells the story of a choice the Israelites had to make after escaping from slavery in Egypt. After they had fled across the Red Sea, God led Moses and the people to Mt. Sinai where God laid out the covenant within which God and the people would live together. God gave them a set of instructions for what it means to love God and to love neighbor, including the Ten Commandments. God gave them instructions to build a moveable home in which God would dwell with them. And God led them from Mt. Sinai to the borders of Canaan so that the Israelites might move into the land that God had promised to Abraham centuries before. Yet despite all this, the people seemed plagued and troubled by fears, doubts, and anxieties, sometimes even going so far as to wish they were still back in Egypt. Time and again, they quickly forgot about their escape from Pharaoh and even the food God had rained down upon them from heaven (Exodus 16). Instead, they could see only the unknowns ahead and embrace only their own fears.

When the Israelites arrived at the borders of Canaan, at God’s instruction they sent in a team of spies to check things out. Sensible enough. However, when the spies returned after forty days, they reported that though the land flowed with “milk and honey,” the Canaanites were simply too strong and as big as giants. In their fear, the people turned back, some even desiring to return to Egypt. Despite their experiences *with* God, their experience *of* God, their faith was weak. They trusted God too little. They weren’t really sure that God would or could keep his promises. Indeed, their faith was not really placed in Yahweh, the God of Moses. Rather, their faith was in a god of their own making, a god much too small to trust with life and death. So, led astray by this tiny god of their own conception, the people would wander aimlessly for forty years until they had died, until their children were ready to trust, *fully* trust, the God-Who-Is and begin their conquest of Canaan.

*Trust or panic?*

Jesus’ disciples were faced with big unknowns of their own and, regrettably, their response was often little better than the Israelites at the borders of Canaan. As told by Luke, one day Jesus and some of his disciples got into a boat to make the trip across the Sea of Galilee. It is a pretty big inland sea and Jesus fell asleep while making the trip. Because the hills encircling the sea are unusually steep (1200-1400 feet above the surface of the sea), storms come up quickly, and a real nasty one did so while Jesus slept. As we might, the disciples panicked, waking Jesus up as they screamed for their lives. Jesus promptly did two things. First, he “rebuked” the wind and the waves, bringing calm back to the sea. Second, he admonished his disciples for their lack of faith. But the disciples have only traded one fear for another. They had been terrified by the storm, but now they were afraid of a new unknown. “Who is this?,” they ask. Jesus commands even the winds and the water! *“Who is this?”*

The disciples fear the storm because their faith in, their trust of, Jesus is weak and feeble. They fear the demonstration of Jesus’ authority because they do not really comprehend who it is that they claim to follow. The disciples are like the Israelites who turned back from Canaan, in that the disciples’ conception of Jesus is too small. Their minds and hearts will require some significant expanding if they are to grasp who Jesus really is and trust him enough to set aside all their fears.

*A god too small*

I once asked a colleague for a book on overcoming our fears. I figured it would be something like, *The Bible’s Ten Steps to Conquering Your Fears*. But no. Instead, the friend urged me to pick up J.B. Phillips’, *Your God Is Too Small*, a slender volume written more than a half-century ago. What a superb recommendation. Underlying the fear of the Israelites was their lack of trust that God could actually keep his promises despite the presence of giants in Canaan. Yahweh might be their God, but, they asked themselves, was he *really* more powerful than all the other gods on the block? Jesus might be the disciples’ Master and Teacher, but did he *really* have authority over all creation, including the demons in the sea? These people feared the unknown because their gods were too small. In this Time of Virus, may we all rest in the expansive mercy and power of our Lord.

*A site to check out*

[This page has lots of common phrases that come from the Bible](https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/bible-phrases-sayings.html). Pretty fascinating stuff. Without the Bible and Shakespeare, I’m not sure we’d have much to say.

*A movie recommendation*

I was channel flipping the other day and caught a bit of *Some Like It Hot*. It has held up really well over the years. If you haven’t seen it in a while, re-acquaint yourself with this Billy Wilder comedy.

*Book Recommendation*

If you read the devotional above, you know the recommendation today is J.B. Phillips’ *Your God Is Too Small*. It is readily available on Amazon.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott