Good morning everyone. Turn in your bibles to the book of Numbers. The title of my message this morning is “Trusting God against all Odds.” We’re resuming our journey through the Old Testament. We left off last spring with the children of Israel receiving the 10 commands and the rest of the law through Moses on Mt. Sinai. We are resuming at the point where God is ready to give them the land he had promised Abraham.

Folks I entered this year believing that this was an opportune year of ministry for us as a church. A year when the church needs to press forward into the needs and opportunities to share our hope and confidence and faith in God with people who are uncertain, insecure, and scared to death.

One of the great tragedies in the work of God’s kingdom is when His people get paralyzed by fear instead of inspired by faith. When you read your bible you can’t come away from reading about any challenging formidable obstacles and storms in the history of God’s people without seeing the opportunity it was for God to step in and glorify himself, redeem the lost, encourage the saints and advance His kingdom forward.

Today’s text rings loud and clear with the devastating affects of God’s people not trusting Him when they are up against all odds. Today we study a failure story. A crisis amid God’s people between Fear and Faith. And many of you and certainly many people in our community are at just such a crisis.

Control of your circumstances is proving to be minimal. Your resources are proving to be inadequate. You may be beginning to feel very small in front of this Giant called recession, unemployment and so forth. And you struggle between faith and fear.

We’re going to read beginning in the book of Numbers chapter 13. But before we do quickly review some history. Abraham and Sarah were Barren and without child. Now there are 2 million descendents. These descendents were oppressively and hopelessly enslaved in Egypt and God delivered them with miracles and mighty acts. This same God entered into a covenant with them and promised to bring them into Caanan and give them the land. But that would involve them going up against fortified cities whose armies were equipped and trained for war.

All they had was the promise of God and the power of God.

**Numbers 13:1-33 (NASB)** Then the LORD spoke to Moses saying, 17"Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am going to give to the sons of Israel; you shall send a man from each of their fathers' tribes, **every one a leader among them.**" 18So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran at the command of the LORD, all of them men who were heads of the sons of Israel.

19When Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, he said to them, "Go up there into the Negev; then go up into the hill country. 18"And see what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many. 19"And how is the land in which they live, is it good or bad? And how are the cities in which they live, are they like open camps or with fortifications? 20"And how is the land, is it fat or lean? Are there trees in it or not? Make an effort then to get some of the fruit of the land." Now the time was the time of the first ripe grapes.

21So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, at Lebo-hamath. 22When they had gone up into the Negev, they came to Hebron where Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmai, the descendants of Anak were. (These were the legendary super heroes of the land.)

23Then they came to the valley of Eshcol and from there cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes; and they carried it on a pole between two men, with some of the pomegranates and the figs. 24That place was called the valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster which the sons of Israel cut down from there.
When they returned from spying out the land, at the end of forty days, they proceeded to come to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; and they brought back word to them and to all the congregation and showed them the fruit of the land. Thus they told him, and said, "We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan."

Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it." But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us." So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

Numbers 14:1-12 (NASB)  Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and 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! "And why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" So they said to one another, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt." Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it to us-- a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they shall be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them." But all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Then the glory of the LORD appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel.

Summarize the Crises

This congregation is caught up in a frenzy of fear. They are in a crises of faith. The spies were sent in to bring back an assessment. They were to bring back visual evidence of the richness of the land as well as a reconnaissance report to know what they were up against so they could prepare and strategize for the occupation.

God knew that what they would find would shake them. God wanted them to know they were up against all odds. Because that would force them to a place of faith and trust. Otherwise they may go in too confident in themselves and that always spells disaster. He wanted them to go in knowing that the only way to succeed was through the miraculous intervention of their LORD God.

The crises is a crises of faith and fear. Would they trust God’s faithfulness and obey. Would they be assured by God’s faithfulness to the covenant with Abraham up till now. As children of God, as God’s congregation we all find ourselves continually in the same sort of Crises of Faith or Fear. The problem is that faith and fear see very different things.

Joshua and Caleb saw the same land, the same inhabitants and the same fortifications as the 10 spies saw. But faith has a different set of lenses than fear has. Fear sees things differently. Fear makes wimps out of men and emotional wrecks out of women. Faith makes men courageous and women assured.
Fear sees with fleshly eyes like the 10 spies. Fear sees the obstacles. Fear sees the enemy as victorious. Fear sees the cost that must be paid. Fears sees its own inadequacies. Fear sees what the enemy can do to them.

Faith sees with spiritual eyes like Joshua and Caleb. Faith sees God’s resources. Faith sees the enemy as already defeated. Faith sees the spoil and the prize of obedience to God. Faith fears rebelling against God and fears God’s judgment.

Fear listens to the majority. Fear is swayed by the opinion of man. After all 10 of the 12 say we should not go. Faith listens to the minority when it is founded on the truth of God and not the opinion of man.

Friends you and I are surrounded by a world that thinks everything God would have us do and be is foolish. The majority is not an indication of righteousness. Even among God’s people and among church leaders and pastors in our nation. The majority opinion is always wrong when it stands in contradiction to the expressed Word of God. The word of God to Abraham was that the land was theirs.

Exodus 6:6-8 (NASB) "Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the LORD.'"

The word of God through the prophet Moses was go get the land. God at this point had commanded them through Moses to Go up into the Land. (Deuteronomy 1:19-21).

It doesn’t matter what the 10 spies said, they should have listened to the voice of God. The voice of God alone is enough to trump an entire cultures words. We are not commanded by God to listen to the majority. “Everybody’s doing it” doesn’t fly far with God, brothers and sisters.

So what does it look like to Trust God against all Odds. When the majority is hollering out in your ears, when peer pressure is pushing, when the media is filling your ears with bad report, when fear is pounding on your heart in pressing up in your face How in the world do you trust God and follow faith.

Here is what the congregation didn’t do and why they failed. Here is what you and I need to trust God against all odds.

**1. Be committed to God’s will, not your well-being.**

AS God’s people we know its not about us. Our life is no longer about us. We are here to serve our king and be a blessing to the world. We are here spread the word of God not preserve our own well being. And many times spreading the good news is not in our own best interest.

Read your new testament. When God’s people get serious about advancing the kingdom they attracted Spiritual resistance and criticism and persecution. But we are called to suffer for the Gospel. We are called to spread the word to the nations. That is all that’s left of God’s covenant.

To be witnesses with the word of God in our mouths to our Jerusalem, our Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Let me take a poll. How many of you were born here in Sauk County. If you were born outside sauk county stand up. Ok you can sit down.
Now let me ask you, “why did you come here?” A job? Family? Wrong! You are here by the providence of God. You are here for his kingdom work. That is why God brought you here. Is a pastor the only one God brings to an area for kingdom work? Heavens no!

The bible tells us we were saved unto God’s good works. (Eph 2:10) John recites Jesus’ words in John 9:4. We must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is still day, night is coming when no one can work. Jesus said to the Father in John 17:18 “as you sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” When he was resurrected from the dead and had appeared to the disciples in the upper room he told them “peace be with you, as the Father has sent me, I also send you.” (John 20:21)

Jesus has sent us into a world to do his kingdom work, spreading the good news of the Gospel and spreading the imperishable seed of the living and enduring word of God. And the odds are stacked against us in spreading His word. So if we are going to trust God against all odds we need to be committed to the will and work of God not our well being.

And you have nothing to fear as a child of God. There is nothing the world can take away from a child of God. Nothing.

All of our stuff is God’s anyway. And our eternity is secure. The grave is no threat to the Christian. The worst that can happen to us is temporary suffering and we understand now that suffering is unavoidable for the believer who desires to be Godly in Christ Jesus.

2. Be reminded of God’s power, not your puniness.

God’s power and our puniness is exactly the right recipe for God’s glory in Reedsburg. It is God sized tasks accomplished through puny, under resourced congregations that bring Glory to God.

The congregation of Israel failed to remember God’s power demonstrated in their behalf when they were utterly helpless to make the next move. They were slaves in Egypt. They were trapped up against the Red sea. God said, just be still and watch. And then who got the credit. God did.

Remember the story of Gideon. God said your army too big for me to help you the way I want and still get the glory. Lets send some soldiers home. Still too big, lets send some more home. And God whittled them down to 300 so he could get the glory when he defeated an assembled army of multiple nations with 300 hundred men. It was against all odds but they trusted and did what God said risking their lives and God got the glory.

The stories of your bible are not meant for interesting reading friend. They are not preserved simply for theology. They are meant to be reminders of God’s power so you can trust Him when you are up against all odds.

It is in our weakness that God’s strength is made perfect. It is precisely when the odds are stacked high and not in our favor that God stands to receive the greatest glory. And there is no greater gift in all the world for the believer or for the congregation than for us to bring great glory to God.

Don’t let the majority get your eyes on how small you are and off how big God is. Faith looks through the lenses of God’s power displayed throughout history.

3. Be assured by God’s promise, not your ability.

The 10 spies said, “We are not able.” Joshua and Caleb said “No ,we are able” and their assurance came from God’s promise not their ability. We are people of promise. We rely on the promise of God not our own
strength. That is why we can look into a recession and see our greatest opportunities both for our own spiritual growth and for kingdom growth.

If you are looking at this recession through worldly eyes it’s a problem. But if we are kingdom minded, eternal minded, redemption minded we see opportunity for God’s glory.

Moving forward into great kingdom activity and ministry in the middle of hard times when the odds are stacked high against us is exactly the right recipe for God’s greatest glory.

(Vision for the future of God’s church in Reedsburg.)

4. Be afraid of God’s displeasure, not your enemy’s threats.

Notice the words of the two spies who trusted God in the face of stacked odds.

**Num 14:9** “Only do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the Land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.”

Lastly we need to be afraid not of Satan, not of the forces of darkness, not of what the world might do to us but of God’s judgment. We should be afraid of disobedience to God and faithlessness. We should be afraid of displeasing God.

Because of the congregation of Israel caving in to the majority opinion and because they locked their eyes on their own abilities instead of God’s resources; because they locked their eyes on the size of the enemy instead of the size of their God; because they locked their eyes on the cost instead of the promise of God they lost their opportunity to be God’s instrument in what would have been their finest hour.

God struck the 10 spies with a plague. God forbade any of the men 20 and up from going into the land because they listened to man instead of God and they listened to fear instead of faith.

They could have been the ones in history of Israel who experienced the walls coming down at Jericho and many other great experiences but instead they sacrificed the glory of God to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until they all died off. They never got to see the land of promise, walk in it, live off it because they chose to fear instead of believe.

Oh what a forfeit and failure it was that day when they saw the future through lenses of fear.

Conclusion: Oh church please let us not be like that. The odds may be stacked against us to accomplish what He wants but God is not against us. He is not against us. He is not against me. He is not against you. God is for us. God is with us. God is faithful. God will never forsake us in our weakness.
Trusting God Against All Odds
Numbers 13-14

Personal Preparation

Take a slow deep breath and say a short prayer asking God to speak to you through His word. Get yourself a pen or highlighter. Now, leisurely read Numbers Chapters 13-14. As you read, highlight or underline any significant phrases you find that may seem to be important to the story. Pay particular attention to narrator comments and dialogue. Note below who the key characters (or groups of characters) are in the story.

Key characters or groups of characters are:

Write down any comments or lines that you believe are significant to the story:

Read Deuteronomy 1:19-40. (Note: Deuteronomy was written later than Numbers; and there is a difference between the two accounts in terms of whose idea it was to send in spies.) Commentators reconcile this discrepancy with the following order:

1. The command to go into the land and take possession without fear. Deuteronomy 1:21
2. Moses finds it agreeable Deuteronomy 1:23, and presumably checks with God first for permission.
4. Then the spies mission and report.

When the spies returned, they took their mission further than they were charged with. They were on a fact-finding mission, but after reporting the facts they made recommendation not to go. This was outright insubordination. This was like a General having sent in Special Forces to investigate and gather intelligence prior to a mission, and then the Special Forces coming back and telling all the regiment to abandon the mission.

It created a huge problem and sabotaged the people’s confidence in Moses and in the Lord.
Small Group Interaction

**Ice Breaker:** Have each member share some of the lines or statements you gathered from the story that you thought were significant, and why.

**Prayer Exercise:** Pray for God to strike fear from your hearts and fill you with faith, optimism, and the ability to see beyond circumstances.

**Scripture Exercise 1:** Read Deuteronomy 1:19-40. From this reading and the one in the introduction, list out the progression and development of fear.

**Scripture Exercise 2:** Reread Deuteronomy 1:21. What did God foresee as a potential problem?

**Discussion Exercise 1:** With all the details of the story now in view, why do you think God allowed them to go in and spy out the land if he knew that it would arouse fear?

**Discussion Exercise 2:** If the people were to move into the land in spite of the sons of Anak, the large fortified cities, etcetera, why would it be more pleasing to God than just having gone in and discovered those things amid the first battle?
Scripture Exercise 3: What were the people afraid of?  
See Numbers 13:28, 31-33; 14:3

Scripture Exercise 4: What should they have been afraid of?  
See Numbers 14:11-12, 14:20-23

Discussion Question 3: What is the result of seeing challenges, obstacles, and enemies through eyes of fear? List everything you can think of in this passage that was forfeited because of their fear?

Discussion Question 4: As a follower of Christ, what might you stand to lose if you make fear-based decisions? What will fear keep you out of?

Prayer Exercise 2: Confess your fears and minister to one another through eyes of faith in prayer.