



“Fear Not!”

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At Christmastime, we hear the words proclaimed on the very first Christmas night. These words are so relevant for us at this time in our lives, with what we are going through, that I want to share them with you twice. First, from the translation many of you like me grew up reading, the King James Version: “Fear not...for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 1:10-11). Second, from the translation we have used now for many years here at St. Paul, the NIV: “Do not be afraid...today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 1:10-11).

Fear not! Why not? Your Savior Jesus has come for you and is with you. Do not be afraid! Why not? Because Jesus has been born for us. Have no fear, God is here! God is with us, through Jesus.

Are you fearful because of the pandemic? Are you fearful of catching the coronavirus, or of dying from it if you catch it? Are you fearful that your life will never get back to normal? Or are you fearful of running out of something essential, such as toilet paper? Yes, there has been another run on the TP at the store! Does this turbulent time that we live in have your life marked by fear? At this Christmas, as many in our world are still plagued by fear because the pandemic is still here, what

an appropriate time to draw near and to hear the message the angel spoke on that very first Christmas night: “Fear not!” “Do not be afraid!”

Those are the very first words the angel spoke to the shepherds when Jesus Christ was born. FEAR NOT! On that night, the shepherds were out in the peaceful countryside watching over the flocks by night, as they did each and every night. In general, shepherds were pretty brave and hearty people, rough and rugged, always ready to rumble if they needed to step up to stand up for their sheep. Shepherds had to protect their sheep against enemies - predators like lions, and wolves, and bears, oh my! Now that’s not a lie, those are some of the animal predators mentioned in Scripture. A shepherd also would have to be ready to stand up to defend his flock against the thief who might try to steal the sheep from him. So shepherds were strong and always ready for what might pop up in the dark of the night.

But what popped up on the first Christmas night was a sight those strong shepherds had never before seen: an angel in the sky, descended from on high, glowing and gleaming in the night. This awesome sight filled the shepherds with fright. The Bible tells us the shepherds were not just afraid, they were terrified when they saw the angel appear above them. In fact, the King James Version tells us that when they saw the angel these brave men were “sore afraid,” which I like to say, partly in jest and partly not, meant that they were so afraid it hurt.

The angel knew those men were filled with fear. God knew they would be overcome with fear, and knew exactly what those fearful men needed to hear. God had his angel speak to them to reassure them. The very first words from the angel’s mouth: “Fear not!” “Do not be afraid!”

Here’s the full wording of what the angel said, directly from Scripture. And the angel said to them, “FEAR NOT, for behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be for all people. For unto you has been born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11). FEAR NOT! FEAR NOT! My friends, God does not

want you to live in fear! That's why the Father sent Jesus. God loves you and wants to take your fear from you. God reminds you of His love for you through what Jesus came to do for you.

We live in a time of great fear today. You know we do. You see it all the time in the news. Maybe you feel that fear yourself. However, this is not the first time in history that fear has plagued our nation. Another similar time was during the dark days of The Great Depression. We think this pandemic is lasting long, at least it looks like it will end in shortly over a year. The Great Depression was here for a full decade. Do you know that it was at that wearying time in our nation's history when the wonderful Walt Disney released his amazing award-winning cartoon "The Three Little Pigs"? Yes, this was simply an animated version of an already existing story, what some would call a fairytale. But Disney took that story, expanded and elevated it, and knocked it out of the ballpark. At the time of its release, it won the year's Academy Award for best animated short film. Since then, experts in the field of animation have proclaimed it one of the 15 greatest cartoons of all time. But maybe most importantly, its celebrated song "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf" became an anthem of hope against the doom and gloom of the Depression! The Depression was the wolf the people needed to be reminded not to fear.

There is also a wolf that we need to be reminded not to fear. Did you hear me? There is a wolf running rampant today that we need to be reminded not to fear! Now you might think that I'm talking about the pandemic. Certainly many do fear it. Do you? Many fear the coronavirus. Do you? Many fear the long-term financial repercussions and societal implications of this critical situation. Do you?

But that's not the wolf I'm talking about. The pandemic is pervasive; the coronavirus is killing many, and sickening many more. But ultimately, God in Scripture points us to the most wily wolf of all. That wolf is the devil, the father of all evil. That wolf is out to snatch you, to

seize you, to devour you, to lead you away from Jesus. That wolf will use anything and everything in your life to try to trick you into doubting God's presence in your life, questioning God's love for you in your life, disobeying the commands of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to beat that wolf who would take you away from Him!



Jesus came to be the ultimate Shepherd who would give His life for His sheep. Why? So that we do not have to be afraid! Remember what Jesus said of that wolf in the Gospel of John? “The wolf attacks the flock and scatters it....The thief comes only to steal and

kill and destroy” (John 10:12,10). Then, in the very same Good Shepherd passage in John, where Jesus tells us of the wolf and what he is trying to do to us, Jesus tells us what He, the Good Shepherd, will do for us, as He faces that ferocious foe for us: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep....I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:11,10).

We do not need to be afraid of the wolf called the devil, because Jesus will beat and defeat his evil through the power of the cross. We do not need to fear death, because Jesus will defeat the power of death through the empty tomb, from which Christ will arise back to life.

Fear not - unto you a Savior has been born - we do not need to fear the end of life, for we will have eternal life through Jesus Christ. Fear not - unto you a Savior has been born - we do not need to fear punishment for our sin. Fear not - unto you a Savior has been born - we do not need to fear the evil of this world or the opponents of God's Word, for they are defeated by the power of our Lord. Fear not! We do not need to fear anything in life, thanks to Jesus Christ!

We do not need to fear anything in life, because Jesus Christ is with us through everything in life. Do you believe that the God who loved you

enough to send His own Son for you to beat the wolf for you is with you in everything in life that you go through? The pandemic could be a wolf that could take your faith from you, but God wants to use the pandemic to draw you closer to Jesus. Fear not!

Of course, we need to remember there's a difference between not living in fear and also not living in foolishness. Living without fear doesn't mean taking excessive chances. Remember later when Jesus is grown and the devil comes to tempt Jesus? Remember how the devil taunts Jesus to throw himself down from the highest point of the temple, saying, "God will send His angels to protect you, Jesus"? Some could say, "Yeah Jesus, you don't need to fear, God is watching over you." Jesus put an end to that foolishness when He said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the foolish test"(Luke 4:12). So you don't need to fear coronavirus, but don't put the Lord your God to the foolish test. Protect yourself! Don't throw yourself down before the coronavirus, or any other precarious danger in life. Protect yourself just as the healthcare professionals tell you to do, and protect your neighbor out of love for your neighbor, just as Jesus calls you to do. Don't put the Lord your God to the foolish test. That's from the words of our Heavenly Father. We also could say it in the words of my wise father, who often told me, "God gave you a brain, so use it."

Earlier in this message I talked about the Great Depression. Remember our presidential leader during that dark time in the history of this nation? Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He once proclaimed, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." I would say, based on what we have heard from Scripture today, the only thing we have to fear is forgetting that God tells us, "Fear not!" Why not? Because He sent Jesus for us. The only thing we have to fear is forgetting the reason God tells us why do we do not have to fear: because Jesus Christ is here. Remember and hear once more this Christmas what the angel said to the shepherds on the very first Christmas: "FEAR NOT, for behold, I bring you glad

tidings of great joy, which shall be for all people. For unto you has been born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11). FEAR NOT!



May God bless you as you remember that Jesus comes to save you from your sins, and as you also remember that Jesus comes to save you from your fears! May God bless you as you treasure the birth of your Savior, who is born so you may live a life that is filled with peace and faith, which God gives, rather than fear, which the world gives. God’s love for you moved Him to drive out the fear from you by sending His Son for you, to beat the wolf for you, to take your sin from you, and to take your fear from you. FEAR NOT!