

**Ser20-49** "Courage that Overcomes Fear" or ad 4 12-20-20

"Sometimes Courage is All We Have"

"The Good News Gift of Advent: COURAGE"

Isaiah 35:1-10; Luke 1:26-38 Advent Candle: LOVE and COURAGE

► Listen again to Isaiah (chap. 35, v. 3): <sup>3</sup> ***Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.*** <sup>4</sup> ***Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.'*** So, What are we afraid of this morning? Indeed, what do you fear? John Buchanan, a presb. Pastor and preacher, in his commentary on our text says, "a two-word distillation of the Bible—the whole Bible--could be: "FEAR NOT." I think He's right. Throughout the Bible we read: "Be not afraid;" Listen to this additional word by JB: "***When the night sky shimmered and an angel appeared, the shepherds were terrified. 'Fear not. Do not be afraid.' The angel said.***"

Fearful living is a horrid way to live. One writer tells of a family with a little girl: At her going to bed time, the parents would read a story, say bedtime prayers, kiss her good night and for years she would say, "Make Sounds." Ah "She wanted the security of her parents' presence, the comforting sounds of their voices, dishes being dried, the television set, sounds of home and safety and love." For others, it's the sounds in the night that frighten us.

***Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.*** <sup>4</sup> ***Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.'***

Of all of the stories in the gospels in the Bible about the birth of Jesus, I have realized this Advent that the story \_\_\_\_\_ read this morning from the first chapter of Luke is my favorite. A young teenage girl, engaged to Joseph (common practice in those days for a younger girl to be married to an older man) is approached by an angel. Can you imagine? Not really, because in our highly empirical and intellectually oriented minds, things like that just don't

happen. Well, in this powerful story it happens to Mary. Where does she get the courage to even stay close enough to this angel to even listen to his declaration? The text says she was perplexed...not frightened, really. Yet the angel sensing her confusion cautioned her to not be afraid.

Oh my...just dealing with the appearance of an angel would have been enough to deal with but to hear this greeting: "favored one...The Lord is with you...you have found favor with God." God wants you. God wants to do something quite fantastic with you, in you... WOW. How much courage does that require? But look at Mary---Maybe it is because of her great courage and faith that God chooses her in the first place. A young woman shall be the bearer of the good news to the world.

And it seems Mary's courage is born into Jesus' courage...all you have to do is look at the life and ministry of Jesus to see that legacy of courage.

In dealing with our fearful situations, our responses usually involve: Fight, Flight or Freeze. When our anxiety is high, we often choose one of these three responses...We can best sense these emotions in our bodies not in our brain, cognitive or thoughts. When we experience F, F or Fr., it's good if we can find a way to ground ourselves in a sense of safety. PTSD involves feeling frightened, triggered by some trauma from the past, but when the truth of the moment is that you are actually safe.

Even tho Jesus isn't a trauma therapist, he spends a good deal of time in his years of public ministry with the disciples quelling their fears..... trying to help them stay grounded, equipping the disciples not to live out of their fears...

- ▶ when Jesus goes to Jerusalem-the disciples are afraid & beg Jesus not to go.
- ▶ When he is arrested, the disciples run away in fear.
- ▶ After his crucifixion, where do we find the disciples? Fearful and hiding in a locked room.
- ▶ On resurrection morning what do we see? The empty tomb and what are the words of that otherwise beautiful morning? "Fear Not. Do not be afraid.

I am wondering what you are afraid of this morning? This season of our

lives. JB: “fear is such an enemy of life. It’s hard to love when you are afraid. It’s hard to care passionately about anything when you’re afraid. It’s impossible to be joyful about anything when you are afraid.

So, what do you fear? ► Losing your job? ► the pending report from the doctor? ► Getting the coronavirus ► Seeing the military detail coming to your house with bad news about your loved one in Afgan.? ► that your angry outbursts or temper will go beyond your control the next time? ► Foreclosure on your house? ► that you really can’t stop drinking like you say you can? ► That you can’t say what you want to say – in a straight and honest way – to some group here at church or at work without causing an uproar? ► That our hopes for political change in the right direction won’t happen ► Santa really will bring you a lump of coal this year? ► that the new pastor TUCC will call won’t be as funny and as handsome as your interim? ► That the peace of Christmas will allude us again this year?

Indeed, what do you fear this morning?

Robert Frost said “*that what really frightened him the most were frightened people.*” I agree with Mr. Frost. Add anger to that mix and wow...those are the people who really worry me.

Then how shall we live in a time of fear and anxiety and even real danger? What does Isaiah say to us this morning? ***Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. <sup>4</sup> Say to those who are of a fearful heart, ‘Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.’***

What does Mary say to us this morning? “Here am I, the servant of God..let it be according to your word.” In one way, it’s not what she says that’s inspiring, it’s what she does. She goes against all of the customs and laws of the culture and bears this one into the world...into our lives.

What does Jesus say to us this morning? It’s not actually what he says that’s helpful to us...It’s what he does with his life that can give us the COURAGE we need to overcome our fear. He lives and acts on the very courage his mother, Mary, showed to him and to the world.

I would offer to you that our courage comes from remembering these words of Isaiah -- ***Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. <sup>4</sup> Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.'***

Put these words of strength and courage in your head and heart this morning....let fear go and claim the courage to do what needs to be done.....to say what needs to be said with love and hope --- and to trust your best spiritual instincts that the promises of Isaiah and of Jesus that your rewards will be worth it. The juice will be worth the squeeze.

► Even tho the disciples ran away in fear from all those moments when Jesus was in trouble, there on the beach shore after the resurrection, Jesus serves them breakfast and trusts them again to “feed his sheep.” He doesn’t forsake us, even when we give in to our greatest fears.

Courage to overcome our fears is found too in the words we will sing this Christmas Eve that echo Isaiah: “Yet in the dark street shineth the everlasting light: the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”

May it be so in your lives and in mine. Amen.