

Do Not Be Afraid – The Gift Offered by God

“Do not be afraid.”

Four words, easily said, they just slide off the tongue.

“Do not be afraid.”

But why should I not be afraid?

But why should we not be afraid?

Of course, there are many sorts of fearful situation.

For me, one of them is dogs. Having been chased by a large dog, like a German Shepherd, in the park as a child of about 6 years, I have never managed to totally outgrow my fear of dogs.

Yes, we had a dog for 10 years, I grew to love Sprocket. I could put my hand in his mouth, I would not be scared if he put his mouth around my arm even knowing how tightly he could hold onto some of his toys getting swung around and the damage that he could do to the downspout with his teeth while he was trying to catch a chipmunk.

But the day that a larger black dog ran at us as we were out for a walk late in the evening, had me absolutely terrified. Fortunately, the owners were out looking for their dog, called it back and it obeyed. It took me ages to calm down after we arrived home.

Other fearful situations might include driving when the road are really slippery, perhaps not realizing how slippery they are until the car starts to slide.

These are very obvious fears, in these cases of physical injury.

There are other situations that can make us fearful, such as:

fear of job loss,

fear of family breakdown,

fear of failing exams or test,

fear of not making financial ends meet, or what to do when an urgent repair is needed without the available means to pay for it,

fear of refugee or immigration applications being rejected,

fear of the bully – whether the threats are physical or emotional.

The angel says, “Do not be afraid.”

The shepherds had plenty to fear.

There were the animals that came hunting for a quick dinner from the sheep they were looking after, particularly the baby lambs in the spring. There was the weather as they sat on an exposed hillside watching over the sheep.

Shepherds were of such low standing in the community that they were not considered reliable witnesses in court. Additionally, people would stay away from them as if they had leprosy.

Mary, Joseph and others from Nazareth and the surrounding area of Galilee were forced to make the long trek to register in Bethlehem. It was probably a four-day journey for most people, probably even longer for a pregnant Mary. We do not know what the price of non-compliance was, how much trouble would they get into for not registering.

The Pax Romana, which kept the peace ... all be it by force ... was expensive to maintain.

Money and people were needed to pay for it and enforce it. It was peace if you were

Roman, it could be brutality if you were part of one of the regions that they occupied, and expensive.

For Mary and Joseph there was also the ridicule and shame of those who were hostile to the couple because Mary was pregnant before their marriage.

Mary, Joseph and their neighbours live in a subsistence economy, the next meal was not assured.

The angel says, “Do not be afraid.”

They might not have had the technology that we have, but the reality is that their lives were not really that different from ours when it came to the concerns, fears and worries that they had to live with.

The angel says, “Do not be afraid.”

“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” (vv10-11)

“Do not be afraid,” the angel says. The saviour, the messiah comes bringing good news:
offering hope in the face of injustice and despair,
offering peace in the face of war and violence,
offering joy in the face of grief and loss,
offering love in the face of hatred and suffering.

Mary and Joseph overcame fear and hatred and made the trek to Bethlehem.

The shepherds overcame fear and injustice, left their flocks and went into Bethlehem, finding the baby as they had been told and went home praising God. The shepherds moved from fear to joy. The world around them had not changed but their view and understanding of it had. They no longer had fear of the emperor or fear of injustice or hatred. Now, this day, was filled with new possibilities.

The angel says, “Do not be afraid.”

Hope, peace, joy and love – they are the gifts offered by God through Jesus Christ. Gifts offered to Mary, Joseph and the shepherds. Gifts offered to us. Hope, peace, joy and love are the gifts we can all share with family, friends and community.

New possibilities abound.

Remember, it is an unwed mother who carries God.

It is the pagans from the East who recognize God.

It is the workers in the field who hear from God.

It is the marginalized neighbourhood who welcomes God.

They chose not to be afraid. They chose to accept the gifts of hope, peace, joy and love.

Remember also that it is God who chooses the lowly and the broken to rise.

“Do not be afraid.” Christmas is here. Let hope, peace, joy and love into your lives. We are invited this night, the night of our Saviour’s birth, to accept the gifts given to us and share them with family, friends and community.

This night our world is full of new possibilities. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Readings: Luke 2:1-14