

August 7, 2022 – Nineth Sunday After Pentecost

“DO NOT BE AFRAID”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Now may the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength, and our redeemer. Amen.

I titled my sermon today, “Do Not Be Afraid”. It seems like it is easy to say those words, but it is hard to live them out especially in today’s world. We still hear about outbreaks of different variants of Covid. Whenever we turn on the news whether local or national it seems like there is not much good news being told to us. The Chinese were upset because of where the Speaker of the House went, there has been a new definition of what inflation and recession is or is not. People who were going to the Twins baseball game the other day in downtown Minneapolis had to walk around the dead body of a person who had been shot. I do not look at it as fear, but the better word would for me would be apprehension every time I go to the grocery store or fill up the tank at the gas station and what my balance will be. Sadly, I know that I am not the only person who feels that way, and for them the word fear is what they feel at those two places. We can hear those words to not be afraid, but it seems hard to believe them when we keep hearing all the reasons why we should be afraid...very afraid.

For the thirty years we lived in small rural towns in Wisconsin, unless we were going to be gone overnight or it was a weekend of festivities in those small towns, very seldom did we lock our doors. When we moved to Jacksonville fifteen years ago, that changed, and our house is always locked. Our next-door neighbor does not just lock their doors, they have a security fence around their house, and we call each other to meet at their gate to talk and they love it when I call that we have been baking and we want to share the bounty. I understand now, but at first, I did not. Oh, I have no plans to put a locked fence around our house, but I am nervous when someone comes knocking at my door that I do not know. Some of you would be very glad to hear that we are now keeping the door locked here at the church when Terry and I are here alone, and it is even when the two of us are here together. I keep thinking how sad that is. I mean shouldn’t the church building be the one place that people should be able to come and go in?

So, repeatedly in scripture we hear that we are not to be afraid and yet we are. How do we overcome the fear that the world instills in us and instead trust in the word of the Lord that tells us we need not be afraid? I do not think that there is an easy answer to that question, but it can be summed up in one word and that word is TRUST.

But we have a lot of trouble trusting if we are honest. We question where God is at when the world seems to be going to hell in a handbasket. When the leaders that are supposed to be serving the people seem to be only serving themselves and reaping the benefits of their positions, or as the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. Isn’t that the way of the world? So how do we trust and let our fears be taken away from us?

As I was writing this sermon on Wednesday, I did something that I have not done for a long time, and I put on one of my Peder Eide CDs and it was in the words of one of his songs that struck me. The song is titled “Break Through”, and the words just spoke to me about being afraid and trusting.

*“I sing all the songs. I read all about you. I know right from wrong. What does it amount to if my life doesn’t show how much I love you? I need you to break through. Tear down the walls. Let everything fall cause I want to praise you. With nothing between you and me. I know there is more I’ve yet to discover. So many things you want to uncover. I’ve been scratching the surface I want to go deeper. Break through the pride. Break through the shame. I have enough of staying the same. Break through the fear. Open the gates, I’m getting tired of playing it safe.”*

In our playing it safe, are we letting the fears of the world overcome us and not trusting that in Christ that we do not need to be afraid? The last song on the CD, is just called “Be”, and the message is to be still and know that I am God. Is that the reason we need to keep coming back week after week to a place like this? Because we **need** desperately even for a short time a place where we can be still and find security. A place that we can hear the reassurance that we do have a good God that loves and cares about what happens to us in our lives. Our God who wants us to trust that we are not alone amid all the turmoil of the world. God our Father, out of his great love, who Jesus says it is his good pleasure to give you and me his kingdom. Just like the earthly gifts we receive in the elements of water, bread, and wine. In the waters of baptism, where we are delivered from sin and death and given a new life in Jesus and anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit to join in God’s mission for the world. As we come empty handed to receive the body and blood of Jesus where our sin is forgiven, and we are strengthened to go out into the world and face whatever it will present to us until we return to put aside our fears and find trust. Sadly, there are too many in the world that do not know of God’s good pleasure to give them the kingdom.

The last two verses of our Psalm speak volumes for us: **“Surely, our heart rejoices in you, for in your holy name we put our trust. Let your lovingkindness, O Lord be upon us, even as we place our hope in you.”**

Let us pray: O Lord, we ask that our fears be taken away from us. That we trust in the promise of your good pleasure to give us the kingdom, even as we walk through the chaos of the world that surrounds us. And that in Christ alone we find the peace that surpasses all human understanding and the grace and love of you that holds the world together until the end. Amen.