

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY DECEMBER 26 2021

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"Do Not Be Afraid!"

Based on Luke 2:10

"There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news..."

The angel said, "Do not be afraid."

But we live in a world that is very afraid.

It is not the first time I have said it, but COVID has ripped off the veneer of our civility and the thin skin of our indifference, and the side blinders of our own frailties, and exposed us to the world, to each other, and to ourselves, like the brilliant sunlight scorches the flesh of a vampire from a science-fiction movie. And we don't like what we see.

- We are afraid of getting sick.
- We are afraid of dying.
- We are afraid of touching each other or talking too close.

- We hide behind doors and computers and television screens, thinking we are safe.
- We are afraid.

We come to church for comfort in these difficult days, and are shocked to see thinning pews, and shrinking budgets and it further reminds us that for as much as COVID has stopped us in our tracks, time has continued to march forward, taking our beloved with it, leaving our churches disoriented and unsure of what to do. We are afraid.

We are afraid.

But we are in good hands.

For the heroes of our Scriptures have told us, that they too, were afraid. As Joshua looked over the enormity of the Promised Land, feeling the weight of leadership and responsibility of taking the staff from Moses and leading the Chosen People home, God said,

Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9).

When the Psalmist cried out in fear in Psalm 91, the answer came back,

*You need not fear the terror of the night
Nor the arrow that flies by day...*

*For He will raise you up on eagle's wings
Bear you on the breath of dawn*

*Make you to shine like the sun
And hold you in the palm of His hand.*

The old priest Zechariah cried out in fear, in the opening lines of the Christmas story, and the angel said, "Do not be afraid." (Luke 1:13)

Mary, the mother of Jesus himself, asked "How can this be?"

And the angel replied, "Do not be afraid." (Luke 1:30)

And to the shepherds, the angel said, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news..."

The greatest men and women of our Scriptures, our role models, our comfort; they too, all experienced the same kind of paralyzing fear many are struggling against today, with fears of COVID, with fears of

change, with fears of declining health or loss of independence. They too, felt exposed, vulnerable, weak.

But in their **fear**, these same men and women faced their **faith**.

They opened themselves up completely to the will of God, and replied,

“Here I am, Lord, send me.”

- They turned their fear into courage and continued the work.
- They stepped out into new ground for the church and for the people.
- They were creative, compassionate, innovative, and invigorating.
- They trusted God enough, to believe that He would never leave their side.

From fear to faith.

From faith to courage.

With courage,

Through COVID,

Through change,

To Christ.

It is all the shepherds wanted.

To see the Christ child.

“Do not be afraid,”

says the angel.

“I bring good news.”

May we be courageous enough in this coming New Year, to bring this good news to the world.

Amen.