

"Be Not Afraid"

September 27, 2020

*I give credit to
Nadia Boltz Weber
whose sermon reminded me:
"be not afraid".*

Gospel reading this morning is from Luke 13. Listen for God.

"At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to Jesus, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." Jesus said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.

Then he laments: Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"

My husband, sometimes watches the Simpsons when I am not around. Which is not my favorite. But when I was telling him about my sermon today to "not being afraid" - He was reminded about a character on the Simpsons named Kent Brockman. Maybe you watch it.

He is kind of a news anchor spokesperson guy with a chiseled face and a low voice. He is the picture of self-confidence. And on one episode, the Simpsons are all gathered around the TV -

Watching an infomercial to purchase a self-help CD series by Kent Brockman called, *Get Confident, Stupid!*

So, Chuck, my husband, who can be a little sacrilegious, said "when you tell me "be not afraid" I think of Kent Brockman self- help advice: *Get Confident, Stupid!*

As if the *only* reason we lack confidence - is no one ever said "Get Confident, Stupid!"

And the *only* reason we're afraid is because we just needed some well-meaning messiah to come along and finally say "be not afraid".

Yeah right.

But honestly, never once have I stopped being afraid just because someone said that.

I AM afraid.

I'm afraid that I might get sick or the people I love might get sick

I'm afraid of America turning into Grapes of Wrath again

I'm afraid of what this election might mean for our country

I'm afraid of my children making bad choices that will have lasting implications.

And strangely, I'm also afraid of stepping on ant hills. Just in case they have some secret way of communicating with all the other ants around and they will all know that I am an ant killer and they will all invade my house when I least suspect it.

And yet, the words *Fear not* show up in the Bible over 100 times, (you will notice that the phrase *Get Confident, Stupid....* doesn't show up even once. Shocking, I know.)

The folks come to Jesus and say: "you should leave town because Herod plans to kill you. And you may remember, this is the same Herod who imprisoned and then beheaded Jesus' cousin John the Baptist.

So, unlike my ant conspiracy theories, Herod was trouble – and represented very real, actual danger.

I love Jesus' reaction. Nadia Boltz Webber puts it like his:

Since Jesus was the embodiment of "*be not afraid.*" He was like, "Oh so Herod wants to kill me? Well, tell that fox that I'm like, SUPER busy!"

He basically said this *to the same guy who beheaded his cousin*: "Oh sorry if this shocks your fragile, bully ego but I'm just not afraid of you".

Jesus, the guy who again and again says "be not afraid" shows us *exactly* what being unafraid looks like. Which is great.

... but honestly, does it take away *our* fear? Not really.

Here's the thing - I'm never going to be Jesus. And neither are you. And I cannot bear to preach a "What Would Jesus Do" sermon.

We already have messages out there telling us that everything will be ok. We will be safe if we hoard enough hand sanitizer; and then have the compassion of Mother Teresa, the physique of our virtual Yoga Coach, the entrepreneurial genius of Mark Zuckerberg, and now, the fearlessness of Jesus.

I'm pretty sure none of that:

- a) is realistically possible or
- b) will actually keep you safe. (pause)

I think our hope for becoming unafraid is found in the *rest* of this story – the part where Jesus calls Herod a fox and then refers to himself as a mother hen.

A mother hen.

Maybe that lovely image of God means something important for us: and by us, I mean are fragile, vulnerable human beings who face very real danger.

I don't believe that this scripture is a description of what behaviors and attitudes you could imitate if you want to be a good, "not-afraid person".

But neither can I tell you that the Mother Hen thing means that God will protect you from Herod or that God is going to keep bad things from happening to you.

Because honestly, nothing really keeps danger - from being dangerous. A mother hen cannot really keep a determined fox from killing her chicks.

If danger is real, and a hen can't actually keep their chicks out of danger, then what good is this image of God as Mother Hen. If faith in her can't make you safe?

Well, let me suggest this. I started to think that maybe it's not *safety* that keeps us from being afraid or even what we are hoping for. Maybe it's *love*.

That means that God's Mother Hen doesn't keep foxes from being dangerous... because they are still out there. Instead, what if God's Mother Hen keeps foxes from being what determines how we experience the unbelievably beautiful gift of being alive?

God, the Mother Hen, gathers all of her downy feathered, vulnerable little ones under God's protective wings so that you know where you belong, because that is where we find that warmth and shelter.

But Faith in God does not bring you safety. The fox still exists. Danger still exists. And what I mean is danger is not optional, but fear is.

Maybe the opposite of fear isn't bravery. Maybe the opposite of fear is love. The Apostle Paul tells a frightened church that it is perfect love that casts out fear.

So, I am thinking - that our response to our own Herods, our response to the very real dangers of this world, because we are people of faith, we are invited to love. Think about it – what if our response to anger, brokenness, was love instead of fear - wouldn't that be amazing?

Yes, we are afraid – but as cliché it might sound, in the midst of it we can do our best to love. And we can be loved.

Martin Luther was once asked what he would do if he knew the world was about to end, *he famously said if he knew “the world was ending tomorrow, then he would plant an apple tree today”.*

I love that - because it is *defiantly* hopeful. As though he actually listened to Jesus when Jesus said “do not be afraid”. If the world were ending, he would respond by - loving the world.

Because the Herods of this world, the dangers of this world, the foxes that may surround us - do not get to determine our hearts. Nor the content of our minds.

So, here is what we do - we plant trees and cast out demons, and heal, and squeeze every single drop of living out of this life.

So, to heck with fear. Because it does nothing to actually keep the bad things from happeningit just steals the joy of appreciating goodness that is around us.

So, love the world, good people.

But, you know, for now, do it from home.