

Sermon 060318 Fear
Scripture Luke 1: 26-38
Sermon Title Do Not Be Afraid

The phrase that most often appears in Scripture, by far, is, “Do not be afraid.” It is usually uttered when Bible people have encounters with the divine presence. The truth is that fear seems to be a central human emotion. It was true in Bible times and it is true today.

Mary is approached by the angel Gabriel and he said to her, “Do not be afraid,” He tells her that she will be the mother of the Messiah. I don’t think anyone would blame Mary for being a shocked and amazed by this encounter.

Studies have shown that people have what is called ‘implicit bias.’ We usually find ourselves segregated by color, economic levels, and to some extent education levels. When we come across someone who is different from us, there is a natural tendency to get nervous or anxious or even fearful. Racial and gender stereotypes become front of mind.

There is a fun test available for free on line to see where you might fall in this area. Google ‘Harvard Implicit bias’ for the free test. I took it. It’s a good way to learn about yourself. I recommend it. For people who live in racially and culturally diverse neighborhoods or work in diverse companies, implicit bias is replaced by tolerance, acceptance, and even friendship and love.

Sadly, implicit bias can and often does turn in to racism and prejudice. Stereotypes becomes hardened, battle lines drawn, and hatred ensues. Some politicians and media types play the fear card and the situation gets worse and worse.

Meg gave a talk to the Woman's Group of the Community Covenant Church recently. She shared a slide show of photographs that goes to some of these issues. She has agreed to join me in this sermon and share some of the talk and photos.

(please insert Meg's PowerPoint here)

So, we learn that courage is the path out of fear and courage is the path to hope.

The opposite of fear is hope. Hope is the expectation of good fortune not only for ourselves but for the group we belong to. Fear feeds anxiety and produces anger. Hope breeds optimism and feelings of well-being. Fear is about limits; hope is about growth. Fear cast its eyes warily across the landscape; hope looks forward, toward the horizon. Fear points at others, assigning blame; hope points ahead, working for a common good. Fear pushes away; hope pulls others closer. Fear divides; hope unifies.

Christianity is a religion of hope. There is always a new dawn that emerges from the darkness. Central to our faith is the idea that God will resolve things in the end times. We can find forgiveness right up

until the end of our lives as the thief did hanging on the cross next to Jesus.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God." Let us be peacemakers and let's fill this world with hope. AMEN