Springfield Presbyterian Church

December 4th, 2022

God Meets Us in Our Fear

1. Fear and Courage

Whenever we read Scripture, it is natural to hear the Word and

interpret it differently, depending on what is going on in our lives – that is part of the beauty of Scripture’s continual presence in our lives. I need to admit though, that every time I read our New Testament Scripture, I’m baffled by Mary’s acceptance of what’s going on around her and within her.

 Here’s the honest thoughts that run through my head, “Whew, Mary, you are a better woman than me – I would have so many more questions for the angel. Or…how do you take this on with such grace – I would be both honored and losing it in the corner.” Mary is amazing. She’s a saint in the Catholic world and while we don’t have saints as such in our tradition…you have to admit, if we started, she would be the first one to choose. She embodies grace, questions the angel with dignity, and throughout her entire life, she is Jesus’ biggest supporter. I love Mary – but I know in my heart that even with an angelic intervention, my legs would be shaking and my heart would be racing and my response would be more like a, “But God, please choose someone else.”

 If we’re honest, isn’t that how many of us would respond? Especially as a young teenage girl in a troubled town she must have had dreams that looked different from what we hear today. I imagine she wanted a nice, lovely wedding, a husband, some children, and an ordinary life. Then the angel comes and things change.

1. Do not be afraid

Mary hears that phrase that we often hear at Christmastime, but

also in a variety of Scripture passages, “do not be afraid.” I find it slightly comforting, but as I look around the world, the phrase only takes me so far. There’s plenty to fear and we said earlier in the service, fear isn’t necessarily a bad thing.

 Fear makes us pay attention when we are driving, so we safely arrive at our destination. A little bit of fear about grades or end of term reports makes us work a little bit harder to motivate us at school and at work. Fear reminds us to get our butt to that annual physical to make sure everything is working right and we are healthy. Fear itself isn’t a bad thing, it’s a good initial motivator, but there’s something more than fear that keeps us going.

 When we face our fears, just as Mary does in this passage, she uncovers the beauty behind the fear – she lives in courage. Yes, fear might motivate, but when we do that which we fear, we live courageously. God continually calls us to courage and our lives depend upon it, but not only our lives, the Kingdom at large needs a courageous church full of courageous people.

 In our passage this morning, Mary seems to get to courage so quickly – she asks a question, takes a moment, and says – let it be so. I don’t think you need to get to courage that quickly – but there’s an invitation here – when called by God, maybe after a sleepless night or two – will you say, “Here I am?”

1. Isaiah

We need a world full of folks who are willing to say, “Here I am.”

And, I’ll be honest, there’s some moments in this calling to ministry where the “Here I am” is said after a groan, a deep breath, or this feeling of – Okay, here I am, but I really don’t know how this is going to work out. In whatever way you need to say, “Here I am” – you are human, the point is that you’ve said it and are committing to something beyond yourself, something divine and holy.

 It seems odd, but the reason we face our fears, step into courage, and say, “Here I am” lies in an earlier passage from the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah is pointing to what feels like an absolute utopia – a world where peace reigns. When I read the Isaiah passage, I take a deep breath – because that’s a world I want to be a part of right here, right now.

1. Peace Now

So, as we bring all these threads together, these ideas of fear,

Courage, saying “Here I am”, and looking towards peace…my question for all of us is, especially now thinking about Isaiah – is, what does peace look like for you?

 I’ll jump start us and share a little bit of what peace means to me. Peace is the place where quarrels end. Peace is a feeling of calm that radiates from your heart and you can feel it in the tips of your fingers and toes. Peace is a place where there are no keys or locks because you never have to worry about safety. Peace is world with no barriers to health and wholeness. Peace eliminates competition, but rejoices in each other’s joy. Peace is a world without fear, but perhaps a world with good courage, where people feel safe to try new things and live differently because they know that love will intercede. Peace invites us to say, “Here I am” without caution, but with excitement, because of what God can do with our minds, hearts, and souls when there is nothing to worry about. Peace was Mary saying yes, because she knew the story of Isaiah, she knew the hope for the future, and peace invites us still now.

 When I think of peace…that’s what I think of. I’m going to again do something a little different this week and I want to ask all of you, “What is peace?” It doesn’t have to be fancy or theologically intense, but let the question just be what it is – when you think of peace, what words or images come to mind. Let’s take a moment or two to share with each other in community, for we learn better together than apart. I will then close us in prayer.

God of Peace,

This season, and every season, you call us to peace in all of it’s definitions. We know though that in order to find that peace, we will have to reach beyond our fear, step into courage, and say, “Here I am” to you when you call us. Grant us courage, grant us peace, as we look towards the day that we will welcome Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior, into this world and into our lives. Amen.