

Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Reno, NV

Pastor Scott Trevithick

Date: December 4, 2022, Yr. A, Second Sunday of Advent

Using Sanctified Art "From Generation to Generation" theme and designated readings (slightly adapted from the Lectionary)

Text: Luke 1:26-38

Title: "God Meets Us in Our Fear"

Focus: From our vantage point, we might look back on Good Shepherd's history as a smooth string of milestones and accomplishments. We may underestimate that those milestones were achieved by people diligently listening for God's call, saying "Yes" to that call, and stepping forward in faith despite fear. We follow the example of Mary, who heard God's call through the angel Gabriel and who, despite confusion and fear, responded, "Here am I the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

The sermon will be a brief one as the feature will be a 20-minute video of Good Shepherd history and mission to celebrate our 75th anniversary. Good Shepherd was chartered with 87 members on December 7, 1947.

Mary Hears God's Call through Gabriel: "Do Not Be Afraid"

The angel Gabriel greeted Mary, calling her 'favored one', and delivering God's call to her as the mother of Jesus.

"Do not be afraid," he told her.

The text directly says she was perplexed. She pondered what sort of greeting this must be. She was confused. She had to have been overwhelmed.

Whatever lingering fear she had, she responded to God's call. She said, "Let it be with me according to your word." She said 'Yes' to God's call.

Faith is not the Absence of Fear, but Moving Forward with Trust

What do you think about fear and its impact on us? I think courageous faith doesn't mean the absence of fear. I think it means that you display courage and take a step forward despite lingering fear. Faith is about trust. Faith is about listening for God's particular call. It is about trusting God will be present when things are uncertain or risky or when we are afraid.

Showing Faith Despite Fear in the Story of Good Shepherd

We've just viewed this wonderful history of which we are a part. From our vantage point of looking back, we see the events in the video as milestones and celebrations, and they rightfully are, but I have no doubt they were scary, risky steps to take at the time.

I'll bet it was scary for **Pr. Jim Oslund**, who was serving St. Mark's Church in San Francisco, to say "Yes" to this invitation from some Lutheran church bishop to develop a new congregation. And in Reno? —I would think that that would have felt *more* risky and scary compared to other places to serve.

Was it scary or risky . . .

- For those **87 charter members** to say yes to joining this new start?
- For any who wondered, **I'm not Lutheran**, will they welcome me?
 - Or I've been **divorced**.
 - Or I **work in a casino**.
 - Or I **bear some other shame** that's particular to whatever era.
- Isn't it risky or scary **for any pastor** to say yes to a call to serve in a new place? It's scary to wonder if you can trust this group of 5-7 people who make up this Call Team or Search Committee and how they're representing this congregation.
- And maybe it's just as risky or scary **for any call team and any set of leader or members** at any time to open themselves up to the new pastor to trust that person. That can be scary.
- What about **scary financial challenges**? Russ Nielson, now deceased, but whose wife Pat is still a part of Good Shepherd, wrote in the 50th anniversary history book that he was elected to the council in the mid-1960s "at a time when everything was broken and there was no money for such problems as a leaking fuel oil tank, a balky and smoky furnace, a backed up sewer line, a bad roof, and a stack of unpaid bills. The council approved Kevin Christensen's motion that nobody could spend a dime without council approval" (p. 37).
- **Get it Built!** It must have been scary to boldly move forward with the "**Get it built**" campaign to build a new sanctuary during Pr. Carl's tenure. Concerns from the neighbors to city permits and parking restrictions to planning to dollars all contributed to the uncertainty.
- **RIC:** And it must have been scary back in January of 2013 when Good Shepherd leaders initiated an intentional period of self-reflection about becoming a **Reconciling in Christ (RIC)** Congregation. They were engaging a process by which the church would consider formally and intentionally welcoming those who were LGBTQ at a time when they knew congregations and denominations had split over discussions related to human sexuality. Congregations left denominations and members left congregations just to talk about being an intentionally welcoming congregation.
- **COVID:** And hasn't it been scary when experienced the depths of the restrictions of COVID and we wondered how people would respond and how the church would be affected?
- **Emerging from COVID:** And, we could say that we are experiencing uncertainty and scariness now as we continued to emerge from COVID, and we recognize that patterns are different and the church is different.

Fear, Faith, and Responding to God's Call

Faith is about stepping forward when it feels risky and scary, trusting that this is God's call, and that God will be present with you as you live out that call.

Today is a celebration of our history. Let us recognize that the saints before us experienced fear but listened diligently to God's call and persisted and moved forward despite whatever fear or uncertainty they experienced.

Like Mary and like these saints of Good Shepherd, may we too listen for the particular call of God and to have the courage to say, whatever fear we may experience, "Let it be with me according to your word" and take a step forward to say "Yes" to the call of God.