

Fear Not Sermon

Intro

Good morning. We're glad to have you with us!

I recently read an article about how people are less happy with our lives than at any time in the last 50 years. Surveys suggest we are more fearful and anxious about our futures than we've been in decades. Certainly, the COVID-19 pandemic has created an even higher level of unhappiness and anxiety, about health, money, our friends, neighbours and relatives and our future.

But one other major reason for this high level of fear regarding the future, according to the surveys is that we feel like we're entirely on our own. We don't trust our leaders (across all sections of society, family, work, politics) to protect us. We feel like we have to make our way through a dangerous world.

Last year, I asked the team to bring words, scriptures and pictures for the church and Janet simply brought 2 words.....Fear Not.....Fear Not.

The words Fear not and don't be afraid appear so many times in scripture as God again and again speaks to his people to not be consumed by the fears in the world.Why? Because you will waste your life and your energy on things that are fruitless rather than making the contribution to the world that God created you for.

Why is it so difficult? Christians believe that we live in a broken and fallen world, that creation is groaning, evil, darkness and danger are real and present, Over 40,000 people have died in the UK from COVID-19, people regularly abuse and damage each other freely..... there are no guarantees of the prosperity, health, romance we believe we deserve.

Passages

This Autumn we're going to be spending the term in the book of Exodus and we're going to discover again and again that God's people were facing threats from everywhere, oppressive outside powers, threats within the community, powerful enemies, drought, famine, exhaustion, selfishness and pride. The dangers were real, yet as they put their trust in Him, God led the people on a journey out from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land.

Exodus 1. 8-22

We join the story as the Israelites are in Egypt and a new king has arisen over Egypt who did not know Joseph, whose story Genesis recounts. The Israelites are growing in number and fear is growing in the Egyptians that the Israelites are growing too big and could turn against them in joining forces with their enemies, or they could leave them and damage Egypt economically.

Full of fear, the Egyptians oppress the Israelites with hard labour, but the more unjust, abusive and oppressive the Egyptians are, the greater in no. the Israelites become... and their behaviour worsens.

Across the globe, we continue to see this same pattern of fear, power abuse and oppression of other nations + races.....as people seek to dehumanise, oppress or kill people who are different to them.

Things worsen, and we have two female Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah, who were ordered to kill any baby boys when they're born. These two godly women however had a reverent fear For God and disobey the rulers of Egypt.....this is one of the first recorded instances of civil disobedience.

Shiphrah and Puah were midwives doing their jobs.....All of us make decisions and face choices on a daily basis? Who and how are we going to follow? **Who are you going to trust and obey?** will I draw back in fear

and compromise or move forward in faith living for a God who promises life in all its abundance? Shiphrah and Puah are taking a huge risk, in resisting evil, and putting God first

Exs

My wife Jo's late uncle loved to do family history research and a few years ago published a book around one of her ancestors who was a fisherman in the late 19th century on the Isle of Man. Fishing over a 100 years ago was an even more treacherous and harsh job than today. The ferocity and unpredictability of the weather, the lack of modern technology of engines and weather forecasts, the economy around fish, but what did he call his boat? Fear Not! Fear Not! If all there is in this world is us, the natural world and our gifts then there are lots of reasons to fear. But if the loving creator of the universe, has our lives in his hands and his presence in our lives.....Genuinely there is nothing to fear and fear has no need to control us. Why? Because perfect love drives out fear.....

Is St Swithin's a Fear Not Family? How can you help others to live that? To move from fear to faith?

In an increasingly secular society, followers of Jesus will find things tough? There have been hard times before! Christians have faced huge obstacles and yet the gospel has triumphed! Back in the early 1700's before the great awakening (thro' Whitfield and Wesley) this is what one writer said.....

"in 1660 in the violent rejection of the Puritans that accompanied the restoration of the English monarchy, much of the nation threw off restraints and plunged into godlessness, drunkenness, immorality and gambling. The gin craze began in 1689 and within a generation every sixth house in London became a gin shop. The poor were unspeakably wretched. There were over 160 crimes in England that had the death penalty. Gin made the people what they were never before—cruel and inhuman. Signs over gin shops read, "Drunk for 1 shilling, dead drunk for 2 shillings, free straw."

And then God got a hold of His church and the whole country changed. Schools were started; hospitals and orphanages were created; reforms took place in prisons, in child labour laws, in housing. The whole country changed through God getting hold of the church.

Conclusion

This morning Shiphrah and Puah point us again to God, to trusting Him at the beginning of this new season, in spite of all the real dangers we face Will you affirm your faith in God this morning, will you acknowledge the very real fears that are robbing you of the life God came to bring and put those fears in God's hands?

Through the lens of fear, our future looks bleak and we'll find our lives full of grumbling and complaining. Through the eyes of faith, our future looks bright; our problems look surmountable and we're thankful for God's provision.. Lord let faith arise amongst us Help us to make the shift from fear to faith personally, as a church and a City.. St Swithin's has a great future if the presence of God stays with us. And if we continue to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we can face our future with faith rather than fear.

Let's pray.

Can we pause a moment and wait on the Holy Spirit together?

What does Isaiah 43. 1-4 mean to you?

Will your anchor hold in the storms of life?