

Fear not...fear a lot..

Matthew 3:1 ~ 12

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DECEMBER 8, 2019

*" A voice of one crying out in the desert,
Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.."*

The phrase "Fear not" or "Be not afraid" appears over a hundred times in the Bible. 103 times, but not **365 times**. The difference between appropriate and inappropriate fear is what this morning's scripture lesson is all about. As Christians we are called to reject fears that are inappropriate and paralyzing and to live our lives out of a sense of hope that is informed by appropriate fears but ruled by faith and love.

In today's Gospel, Matthew tells the story of John the Baptist - John, he says, appears in the wilderness, preaching that the people should repent because the kingdom of God is breaking in to human history.

There are, in short, two kinds of fear.

One kind is the selfish, inappropriate, exaggerated fear that is the result of unscrupulous people hoping to gain power over us. It is the fruit of an electronic news media in constant need of sensational stories. It is the fodder of the

internet, the informational junk food of bloggers and twitterers.

The result of a steady diet of this fear is despair. We become frozen, paralyzed, unable to move. We fold in on ourselves, seek only our own well-being and refuse to hear any pleas beyond our own. We abandon hope, eschew courage and succumb to that terrible melancholy that Søren Kierkegaard called, “the sickness unto death.”

Or there is the appropriate fear, the fear of the Lord that is the delight of the faithful and the joy of the true disciple. This “fear of the Lord,” is that awe and wonder that Isaiah experienced on the day he was called to be a prophet: This is the fear, the awe, the wonder, the reverence that leads not to despair, but to hope, not to paralysis but to action, not to death, but to life. It is the fear that brings forth fruit in the lives of those who experience it, fruit of the spirit, as Paul called it, and the results of fruitful living. It is the fear which confronted the shepherds on that special night, the fear which results when Angels sing and say to us, “Be not afraid...”

“Be not afraid...That’s John the Baptist’s message to us on this Second Sunday in Advent. The Kingdom of God is near. God is coming. He’s kicking off His final plan to restore the world to a relationship with Him. Don’t just go through the motions this Christmas season. Don’t just make an outward show of your religion. Turn back to God. Confess your sins. Get the garbage out . . . and bear the fruit of joy and peace that comes from knowing that you are a friend of God.