

Let us pray,

Lord, help us to see our fears and our worries, and give them to you. Hold us in your loving arms.

Amen.

“Get up and do not be afraid”

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The disciples after hearing the voice of God amongst them saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved: with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”

They fell to the ground in fear.

Why would they be afraid of such a tame statement?

Why was fear the response to the power and glory of the divine expressing such affirmation towards their Rabbi, their Lord?

Maybe it was some insecurities on the disciples' part.

Maybe they didn't believe they were worthy to be in the presence of the voice of God.

Maybe the voice itself was so loud and powerful, they didn't know where the voice was coming from.

Maybe they were afraid they were in trouble.

Well, whatever the reason, fear is what overcame them in the presence of our God.

And this isn't surprising.

So many of us are told that we are too fear our God.

That we should have a sense of caution around God, because he will judge us for our actions, and we may not like the result.

Maybe fear for God isn't about the fear of losing our life, but maybe it is the fear of being confronted with how we have lived our lives.

But the bigger question is; should we fear God?

Well according to Jesus, it doesn't seem like we should.

After all, he did say:

“Get up and do not be afraid.”

As you all know, I was away for Lead Pastor Training at United Lutheran Seminary at the Philadelphia campus.

And one of our lecturers was Rev. Sunitha Mortha

And she was talking to us about systems and organizations and how they develop vision and mission and live into them.

But the thing that stuck out to me the most, was the emphasis on our desire and our need to belong.

And my question to us here at Grace.

Do we believe that we belong in the presence of God?

Did the disciples who were on the mountain with Jesus, believe that they belonged there?

The disciples originally thought that this place with Moses, Elijah and Jesus was awesome.

They really wanted to make some permanent structures on the mountain for Jesus, Elijah and Moses.

But they said nothing about a tent for themselves.

Then God steps in and God's presence becomes overpowering to the point of fear.

Even as Jesus' disciples, they seemed to feel like outsiders, or observers, rather than wanted participants.

Sometimes our place of worship can feel like this.

It can become a place where we are unable to be our authentic selves.

Where we have to hide who we are on the outside, in fear of being judged or not accepted.

Sometimes our place of worship can become a place where judgement over powers our call to love.

Sometimes our place of worship can make us feel like God has abandoned us, or doesn't love us, or doesn't want us.

Sometimes we can feel like we are on the margins of the church community.

But Jesus reminds us, that even though we may be fearful of the judgement of God, and even the judgement of others.

And even if we feel like we don't belong in the presence of the beloved community.

I hope that each one of you know, that you belong here.

You belong in the beloved community.

God wants you here, the good and the bad.

Because our God is a loving God, who does not rule with fear, but with love.

The voice of God said: listen to Jesus!

So when Jesus says he loves us and forgives us, lets listen!

If church isn't a place where we can stand tall in our sins amongst other sinners and receive Grace, then fear wins and no one belongs.

But if we can stand boldly, and receive each other with kindness, grace and mercy, and say I love you, no matter who you are,

what you have done, or what you believe, because you are my sibling in Christ.

If we can do this, we can create a community that not only encourages belonging, but brings a foretaste of the kingdom to come.

No one is beyond the Grace of God, and no one should be beyond the beloved community.

Not one of us is perfect, not one of us can stand in front of God, and say that I have done no wrong in my life.

So our call as Christians, is to stop hiding from each other.

Stop being who we think other people want us to be.

And instead, be open and honest about who we truly are, so that we may be received by the beloved community and the presence of God, without fear.

“Get up and do not be afraid”

You are loved and cherished even in your sinfulness.

You belong here, you belong in the community of believers, you belong in the kingdom of God.

Not because I said so, but because Jesus said so.

“Get up and do not be afraid”

Do not be afraid to be who God is calling you to be, to speak what God is calling you to speak, to act how God is calling you to act.

And above all, do not be afraid to love as God calls us to love.

Come and see, all are welcome, no one is denied a seat at the table.

And when God says no one, God means no one.

“Get up and do not be afraid”

God is at work in this place, may we not be afraid to say yes to God’s call.

And may we not be afraid of each other, but learn to love one another, in the way our crucified Christ loves us.

You belong, you matter, you are needed, and most importantly, you are loved, so do not be afraid.

Amen.