

December 7 & 8, 2024

Do Not Be Afraid | *Hold Hope*

Luke 2:8-20

Pastor Paul Dean

My Dad was a pastor, and we live next to the church and there was a field between our house and the church with a playground, basketball court, open green space, a couple of picnic tables with a sidewalk running alongside the road that connected our house to the church. Occasionally we would be at church in the evening either for youth group activities or for Lenten services.

When it was time to go home, I would race one of my sister's home and then lock her out of the house. Every time she knew this would happen, but she couldn't leave early, none of us could. She would get very frustrated which made it even more fun for me. And I never lost. On one particular evening I'm running home from the church, like usual in the dark on the grass along the sidewalk. My sister is running on the sidewalk and I'm trying to give her just enough hope that maybe, just maybe, this time she would win, and then the plan was to sprint ahead and quickly lock the door.

What I didn't know was that someone had moved one of the picnic tables over next to the sidewalk and in the dark, I had no idea... until it was too late – wham I ran full speed into that picnic table, and I went down. I was in so much pain that I don't remember how long I laid there or how I was able to get up and limp home. What I do remember is that when I did get home, she had turned off all the lights and the door was locked.

Darkness can be dangerous. Darkness can be scary. But I think what darkness does more than anything is lie. Darkness is the great liar. Darkness tries to fool us into believing that nothing is there. Turn the lights off in this room – make it completely dark and the lie would be that this is an empty space...No chairs. No band equipment. No people. That's what darkness does – it lies to us. And the great lie that darkness tells us is that there is no hope. But that is the nature of darkness – darkness simply exists in the absence. Particularly in the

absence of light. That's why darkness as a metaphor for all kinds of dangerous and scary things is so powerful. And it's also why light as a metaphor for all kinds of beautiful and wonderful things is powerful too.

And out in the fields at night on what we now call Christmas Eve, were a group of shepherds who were in the dark. They may have had a small fire to keep warm, but they were in the dark with all kinds of potential scary things. The reason they were with the sheep was because there were potentially scary things out there. Their staffs were not walking sticks. They were weapons to ward off those scary things.

But they were in the dark in another way. They had no idea that the savior of the world had come into the world. They were in the dark, they did not know God was coming into the world in a whole new way.

9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. (Luke 2:9-11 NRS)

It was in darkness that the light – the glory of the Lord – shone around them bringing them the good news. It's one of the main reasons why light is used to describe who Jesus is. It's one of reasons why we light the hope candle. This light brings us hope. A hope we can hold. It's why we light up our houses and trees during this season. It's all reminders of who Jesus is and that the light has come to us, like shepherds, living in darkness. We are reminded that Jesus is the light of God... come to us.

Darkness has no chance... This is how the Gospel of John talks about it...

4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:4-5 NRS)

Yes, we experience the darkness of the unknown,
and we hold hope, we are not alone, God in Jesus
has come. Yes, we experience the darkness of fear,
and we hold hope, we are not alone, God in Jesus
has come. Yes, in the darkness we will run
headlong into lots of things and no matter how
long we lay on the ground in pain Jesus comes to
us, lifts us up, even limps with us and when we
finally get home, the lights are on, and the doors
are wide open. This is the promise of Christmas.
God in Jesus has come. Hold hope.