

## **“Be Not Afraid”**

John 1:1-14

Pastor Jon Haakana

Be not afraid, it is a greeting that we hear several times throughout the Christmas story. It is how the Angel Gabriel first addressed Mary when he came to tell her that she would bear the savior of the nations; “Be not afraid Mary for you have found favor with God.”

It is how the angel of the Lord addressed the shepherds when they were in the fields tending their flock on the first Christmas night; “Be not afraid, for behold I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people...”

In fact, three times in the first two chapters of St. Luke’s Gospel we find the angel of the Lord

telling somebody to be not afraid. And about 10 times in the four Gospels we find Jesus himself

telling people be not afraid. And I would say of all the messages we hear at Christmas time besides the birth of Christ this is the important message: “Be not afraid!”

No, you probably will never see it posted on the front of a Christmas card because it does not go along with the presents and joy we associate with Christmas. But it is truly one of the most important and most comforting messages we hear during the Christmas Season – “be not afraid.”

There are many things in our society that could set us on edge that could make us worry or be concerned. Especially in a year when we have seen so many natural disasters effect so many of our brothers and sisters in Christ’s lives. In a year where we have seen many men and women and children injured or killed for the sake of power or purity or religion. In a year where we have seen plane crashes, train wrecks and car accidents claim the lives of many.

In a year where church attendance declined a little more in many churches, and consequently so did brotherly love and morals and values in our society. In a year where we have seen highs and lows in the economy, and both optimism and uncertainty in world markets and in economic development.

But even when we see these things occurring that may cause anxiety or concern about our future, Gabriel’s Christmas greeting should be ringing in our ears louder than anything that this world has to say; “Be not afraid!” Be not afraid because your God is in control. Be not afraid, because your God has bought and paid for your eternal life

through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus our Lord.

So that no matter what happens to our today's, through the gift of the Messiah our tomorrows are assured in God's eternal kingdom. And nothing can take that from us! Be not afraid, because your God is still at work in the midst of all that is occurring. Yes, we can see the negative, the catastrophic events and the bad things that occur in our world. But in every one of those events, if we look at little bit further we will see God at work in them, saying "you cannot win, this is my world and I still love it."

Be not afraid, because through the birth of the Messiah God has given us the gift of Emmanuel

which means God is with us. So that no matter where we go, or what we do or what we encounter, God will be right with us.

Through the birth of the Messiah, God has shown us that he will always love us and he will never leave us alone. God will never forsake us. He will never leave us hanging out there to figure things out on our own. But he has given us Jesus Christ, and through Him, God has pitched a tent in our world saying, "I am not going anywhere."

A week ago A Charlie Brown Christmas aired on national prime time television for the 50th time. Charlie Brown is best known for his uniquely striped shirt, and Linus is most associated with his ever-present security blanket. Throughout the story of Peanuts, Lucy, Snoopy, Sally and others all work to no avail to separate Linus from his blanket. And even though his security blanket remains a major source of ridicule for the otherwise mature and thoughtful Linus, he simply refuses to give it up.

**Until this moment... Take a look... (Linus video clip)** In that climactic scene when Linus shares "what Christmas is all about," he drops his security blanket. Looking at it now, it is pretty clear what Charles Schultz was saying, and it's so simple it's brilliant.

The birth of Jesus separates us from our fears.

The birth of Jesus frees us from the habits we are unable (or unwilling) to break ourselves.

The birth of Jesus allows us to simply drop the false security we have been grasping so tightly, and learn to trust and cling to Him instead.

The world of 2015 can be a scary place, and most of us find ourselves grasping to something temporal for security, whatever that thing may be. Essentially, 2015 is a world in which it is very difficult for us to "fear not."

But in the midst of fear and insecurity, this simple cartoon image from 1965 continues to live on as an inspiration for us to seek true peace and true security in the one place it has always been and can always still be found.

Be not afraid, because the darkness did not overcome the light as our Gospel lesson for today tells us. Many times throughout history, the darkness has tried to conquer the light of the world. Many times it has looked like the darkness has won or is winning and the light will be extinguished.

It looked that way to the disciples on Good Friday when Christ hung bleeding on a cross and then was laid in a tomb. It looked like all hope was lost and that the darkness, the devil, sin, death and evil had won. But lo and behold on that glorious morning 2,000 years ago, the light shone once again, brighter than it had ever shine before, which showed this world, which showed the disciples, which should show us that nothing, no nothing can conquer or stop the light of our awesome God!

The Light that God sent into this world on that first Christmas through his Son, Jesus Christ shines just as bright today piercing the darkness of our world. Because the darkness did not, cannot, and will not ever overcome the light! As Christians we should always remember that God's light will always shine which means God's promises, God's grace, and God's gift of eternal life will never be extinguished!

So we cannot give up hope, we cannot look out and say, "Well that's it, we can't do anything!" We need to realize always that Christ's light can never be stopped, so neither should we. The gift of Christmas, the gift of the Messiah, God's only son shows us that the darkness did not and cannot overcome the light. The light still shines brightly into our society, so we need not ever be afraid.

It still shines just as brightly in our churches even though attendance may not be what it once was.

It still shines just as brightly into our hospital rooms when the doctor says, "I am sorry it is terminal."

It still shines just as brightly into our lives even though there is uncertainty or confusion.

The Light still shines and always will shine just as brightly into this world, but we have to be willing to look for it. So we need not be afraid because our God is the God of love and is and will always be in control. Be not afraid, for I bring you good news – the light of the world has come, and will come again! Be not afraid! Amen.

## **Just Drop the Blanket: The Moment You Never Noticed in A Charlie Brown Christmas**

This week A Charlie Brown Christmas aired on national prime time television for the 50th time. In a world where the latest greatest technology is outdated in a matter of months, and social media trends come and go in a matter of days, 50 years of anything becomes quite meaningful.

I am a fan of all things nostalgic and all things Christmas, and so when the two are combined I am hooked, and the Charlie Brown Christmas special falls squarely into that category.

I was in the first grade back when they still performed Christmas pageants in schools (less than 50 years, but still a very long time ago), and our class performed a version of the Charlie Brown Christmas. Since I was kind of a bookworm and already had a blue blanket, I was chosen to play the part of Linus. As Linus, I memorized [Luke 2:8-14](#), and that Scripture has been hidden in my heart ever since.

But while working so diligently to learn those lines, there is one important thing I didn't notice then, and didn't notice until now.

Right in the middle of speaking, Linus drops the blanket.

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Until this moment. When he simply drops it.

In that climactic scene when Linus shares "what Christmas is all about," he drops his security blanket, and I am now convinced that this is intentional. Most telling is the specific moment he drops it: when he utters the words, "fear not" (at :38 seconds).

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