

Sunday 10 December 2023

Life Group Leaders' Notes

Series: Living Without Fear

Title: Don't Be Afraid: You Are Highly Favoured

Key Text: Luke 1:26-38

Today so many people are afraid for so many reasons. We may have fears about our health, our families, our finances and our future. And of course, we may fear many negative things that we see happening in the world around us.

But the Christmas story tells us that we do not have to fear. Instead, we can confidently put our trust in God who is real and completely reliable. We can know His peace and comfort in our minds and in our emotions.

The phrase 'do not be afraid' occurs 365 times throughout the Bible-one for every day of the year - and is repeated at different moments in the Christmas story, including with Zechariah as we heard last week (Luke 1:12-13). This same command, 'do not fear' was repeated to someone at the other end of the age scale: a young unmarried woman who suddenly discovered that she would become a mother - the mother of Jesus, the saviour of the world (Luke 1:26-38).

The story of the virgin birth of Jesus is reported in the Bible as fact, not fiction. Many cynics and comedians have dismissed the origin of Christ as a myth and make believe. But the Scriptures clearly declare that Jesus was conceived in the womb of his mother Mary by a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit and without a human father.

Since this story really happened at one moment in history, can you imagine how Mary would have felt hearing this news? She was not married, and she was going to be pregnant but not by her future husband who was so faithful with her. What would she say to him? What would he say? How would people in their small community react? And how would she explain that her baby was actually the long-awaited Messiah?

No wonder the Bible says she was 'greatly troubled' and asked "How will this be since I am a virgin?" But in this moment the angel said to her "do not be afraid". These are words from God that we all need to hear from God and receive in our hearts. Don't be afraid. Don't be fearful. Stop being anxious. The Bible shows us how we can live without fear. In this story we see strong reasons why Mary moved from fear to faith-reasons that apply to us all:

1. You do not have to fear because you can know God's favour (Luke 1:28; Luke 4:18-19)
2. You do not have to fear because God can do the impossible (Luke 1:37)
3. You do not have to fear because God can change your life for ever (Luke 1:38)

Apply

1. You do not have to fear because you can know God's favour. Mary was young, poor, and a female with few rights. She was living in the middle of nowhere. She did not seem significant, just a name on a census form. Her education and her ambitions were limited. But the angel of the Lord said that she was highly favoured (Luke 1:28). Favour is one of the great themes of the Christmas story and of Christianity (Luke 4:18-19). Favour means that God is for you not against you. He wants to bless you and come close to you. Maybe that is a big surprise to you but God is for you. Jesus came not to condemn but to save you from your own sins and from all forms of evil. Right from the beginning of time we read that everything that God created was good. God is good and He wants to do good things in your life. God wants to help you and show you His favour. God's favour can take many forms. He can bless you in your marriage and in your family. He can bless you in your health and in your finances. He can bless you by bringing good out of bad situations. He can bless you with His protection and providential guidance. He can bless you with peace and prosperity in your career. Above all He can bless you with His presence. You can know God as your friend, your deliverer from guilt and fear and shame. You can experience the spiritual favour of forgiveness, of new life, where you come to know and trust God. You can know Him as your strength and support in times of trouble. You can know that you are precious to Him. Even in the everyday things in life you can find favour: favour for a job, in finding a parking space in a crowded area, favour in your shopping when something you wanted for Christmas is still available with a big

discount in the January sales. Seriously our heavenly father can give us more favour than we might imagine. You can find favour, both in big and small matters, not because you deserve it but simply because of God's love, mercy and amazing grace. Never mind how afraid or uncertain you may be right now, when you know the Lord your best days and greatest joys are ahead.

2. You do not have to fear because God can do the impossible. God is a great God who can work miracles (Luke 1:37). He can do what is not naturally possible. Miracles were a common part of the life and ministry of Jesus. He healed the lepers. He gave sight to the blind. He made the deaf hear and the mute speak. He caused the paralysed to get up and walk. He delivered the demonised. He Himself was raised back to life after the most terrible death. In our reading all this was to come, but Mary, despite her fears and uncertainty, chose to believe that nothing is impossible with God and that when God is on your case all options are open. Of course, sometimes it is difficult to have faith especially if you have had a tough life and have been waiting a long time for your miracle. But God can do miracles. Nothing is impossible with God.

3. You do not have to fear because God can change your life for ever. Mary let go of her fears and submitted herself to God's will (Luke 1:38). From that point on this ordinary and unknown young woman would become revered throughout history. Although that was a unique miracle, your life too will be different, for time and eternity, when you discover the God of favour and surrender your life to Him.

- Change comes in you: In Mary's case a baby was conceived through supernatural intervention. Long before the days of IVF treatment she believed that God could cause a seed of life to be implanted within her. When people have a close encounter with God it is like a new birth. The life of God is like a seed that is planted within you. You have new desires and ambitions. You want to please God and live right.

- Change comes through you: For sure God wanted to show his favour to Mary. But through her he wanted to bless everyone who would ever walk on planet earth. So it is also that when you come to a new experience of God's favour and love, you will then be a blessing to your family, your colleagues, your community and the world.

Today is your moment to leave your fear and put your trust in God. His favour and love is towards you. He can do what seems impossible for you. He can bring wonderful change to you and through you. Today His Holy Spirit is making Jesus real to you. He is calling you by name and saying to you 'don't be afraid.'