

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
March 22, 2020
by Rev. Dave Le Grand

I had heard it said that "Be not afraid" is said 365 times in the Bible. That is actually a myth. But blogger Milly Jones lists at least 145 times that *Do not be afraid* is spoken in the Bible.

Can you think of a Bible story when that is spoken? Often people remember the angel appearing to Mary when Gabriel breaks the news to Mary that she is going to give birth to a Saviour, then the choir of angels saying "Be not afraid" to the shepherds in the field.

You can be assured that any time an angel appears, there is fear. Just as when Jesus spoke the words that Catherine read, to his friends. Jesus knew that tumultuous times were coming. I'm sure that a moment like that would have been charged with emotion. The disciples sensing a major event coming. Scared.

I know that every one of you joining us in worship today feel the charge of this moment, this time in our lives. It is a time like none other.

Fear. Speculation. Waiting. Worrying. Filling in the blanks when authorities don't seem to have all the answers.

Our Moderator, Richard Bott says in his letter to the nation:

I have also noticed, both on social media and on traditional media, a great deal of misinformation and "hyping" of fears. While that is understandable in the face of the unknown, it isn't particularly helpful.

Isn't it true how fear takes hold inside of us? Uncertainty breeds speculation, and in turn misinformation. Measures like quarantine, and closing social centres and businesses are important measures right now, but they disconnect and isolate us. We, your worship leaders at St Andrew's United Church, are here to remind you of those oft-quoted words of our United Church Creed: *We are not alone. God is with us.*

Maybe simplistic. But I don't think so. They are profound words. They are an echo of angels and prophets and teachers and Jesus himself; that Debby in your home, and Sylvia in your condo, and Howard in your apartment, you are not at all alone. We are not facing this health crisis alone. God is with us, and we are a community joined by technology, but also joined as community when we pray for each other and our world.

There is one other way, I suggest, that we are connected as community, potentially. When I ask you, "Who in your life have you not talked to lately, but might need a word of encouragement today in these worrisome times?" Who do you think of?

I invite you sit with that question if a name or face doesn't immediately come to you. I would suggest that that person came to your mind because you have a special concern for them, a gift from God, and maybe it is your calling, your holy tap on the shoulder, to reach out to that person by phone, find out how they are and let them know that you care.

Don't be afraid. You are not at all alone! We are connected, and these are the times when we need to follow our hearts and reach out especially to those in our lives who might be most afraid and feeling most alone. Let them know that they too are not alone. This, I think, is what Jesus refers to in the Gospel of John when he says, "My peace I give to you... not as the world gives do I give to you."

In these challenging times, echoing the anxiety of those disciples dreading something that they sensed but could not fully understand. In these anxious times, our flow of care for one another is the very flowing of God's love and peace among us. We will get through this...together. In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God. Amen.