

Do not be afraid, little flock. It is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Fear not! Do not be afraid. These words come to us again and again throughout the scriptures and yet.....and yet we fear. We fear so many things.

Abram was afraid that he would die without a son to carry on his name and receive his inheritance. He'd been promised by God. Promised! But at 99 years old he was 'a man as good as dead' and God now tells him he will be the Father of a Great Nation. It's beyond imagining.

Remember the disciples in the boat in that terrible storm on the Sea of Galilee? Wind and waves and death stalking them in the darkness of night and they are told Be not afraid!

Be not afraid – and yet we fear.

Yet not as those without hope. That brings us to Hebrews.

The writer of Hebrews wrote “Now Faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of thing unseen” Hope is the energy that powers faith – and so we cry out in times of trouble expecting that someone is listening, trusting that our cry is not in vain. In faith we place our hope in the Lord and in the life God offers to us.

We live out our lives on the knife's edge of fear and hope. Fear of what is threatened and hope that there is a different outcome just on the horizon. Our lives are lived out in the shadows of uncertainty where fear and hope are conjoined, twisted together, constant companions.

Today Jesus talks to us as a flock, the Father's flock, at Trinity, Herkimer. A flock isn't about individuals or history or habit, it's

about community— and that's what we are: a community of faith where we hold each other up, shelter the weak and feed the hungry.

We gather at this place because that is where Jesus is – the one who has told us not to fear, the one who is our hope. We gather around the good news of Jesus – from whom we draw life.

So I wonder, What does Jesus look like in this place? What is happening now or has happened in the past among you that has transformed your life? Brought you back? Kept us together as a flock? Where have we met God in the past? How has Jesus shown up among us?

I ask these questions because Trinity is afraid like so many other small congregations. Trinity fears that there aren't enough people to make it all work or money to sustain what you've always known – the building or the piano or pay the bills.

I know what you are thinking – because I have sat with congregations who have watched the world change around them and the practice of church shift. You are thinking What we need is some young families! We need more children! We need more volunteers!

But more important than what Trinity needs is WHO Trinity IS. Are we a community of faith formed around the risen Lord Jesus who took on flesh so to walk among us – the broken and lost – and who reaches out to offer hope and healing?

Are we a community of faith who has found life here in God's presence and among one another, and then offered

an open space to others who are also seeking life giving hope?

Our fear is around numbers: are there enough people - enough dollars. But maybe we should be asking Is there enough Jesus? Is there enough grace for others? Is there enough welcome? Hope? Healing?

Is God still in this place calling the broken to new life? Isn't that enough? Isn't that at the heart of our faith?

Jesus says, 'have no fear little flock. It is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom'

Fear not!

I look out to you and see faithful people. You are blessed with leadership who are willing to lead and who have been doing the heavy lifting that goes with keeping an organization afloat. Your outreach ministries have grown over these past 4 years, even during the pandemic you have offered an opportunity for folks to hear God's word and worship each Sunday.

But we are more than an organization or a building – we are a community of faith gathered around Jesus – and so I ask What work do we need to do to be sure that our spiritual center holds? That our spiritual core is healthy? That we are centered on faith and not traditions or memories or personal preferences and routines?

What work do we need to do to be an open community that is continually listening for God's voice – expecting God to push us towards fresh green pastures and to challenge us as a community to evolve into something we can't imagine?

How have we closed ourselves off and turned a blind eye to the world as it is and the pain that lives here in Herkimer? For we know that there are others out there – others without any history here, without family ties. Folks whose lives don't look like ours and who don't know Lutheran. Folks who have lots and lots of questions. Folks who are desperate to experience grace – and love – and healing. Others whose lives are twisted with fear and hope.

Others who are searching for the hope that you and I have found in Jesus and in a life of faith.

So - Are we ready to take the next steps on this lifelong journey of faith – not in despair or desperation like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, but in the living hope of life in Jesus?

Hebrews tells us 'faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen'.

Let us therefore step out – and walk in faith with the Lord, for he is our salvation.