

His Gospel Is Peace Series  
Sermon – First Sunday in Advent 2024

## **No Fear of the Future**

***“Surely the righteous will never be shaken;  
they will be remembered forever.  
They will have no fear of bad news;  
their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord.  
Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear;  
in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.”***

*Psalm 112:6-8*

Now that Thanksgiving has passed and December is here, it's official. We are *IN* the Christmas Season. It's the most wonderful time of the year.

Yet, if that's true, then why are we so anxious? The holidays are supposed to provide an escape from the worries and fears of life. And yet, in our celebrations, there are tons of uncertainties we worry about. Potential problems are everywhere. If this is truly the most wonderful time of the year, then why are we so anxious?

There will be wrapped presents under a tree with your name on them. You have no idea what's in each package. Will you like it? If it's clothing, will it fit? Will you have to feign excitement so as not to hurt Aunt Linda's feelings? Someone is always hurting Aunt Linda's feelings.

Perhaps this is also the first Christmas season in many years when you'll spend time with your oldest child. She's been hit or miss on the holidays. But this year, she's coming home and bringing a "friend." At least you think they're just friends. Maybe they're dating, but you're not really sure. Does it make you a bad parent that you can't instinctively infer the status of your daughter's relationship?

For some of you, there's the work holiday party coming. Will you get stuck in the corner, chatting about politics with Steve from accounting? Will you be pulled into a painfully awkward attempt at

karaoke? Will your boss be disappointed if she catches you leaving early to beat traffic and avoid the gift exchange?

And speaking of gifts, how are you going to pay for the pile of presents waiting in your shopping cart in your Amazon account?

These concerns may seem petty, but they are real. And they pile up. Advent, Christmas, and life in general are filled with things we can't predict, outcomes we can't control, and futures we can't foresee. Add them all up and we are weighed down and filled with dread.

Yet, the good news of Advent is that our days of anxiety are numbered. The birth of Christ and His promised return, mean that an era of peace, which will never end, has begun to break through. It is a peace that will erase all fears, no matter what kind. And while this peace will not be fully here until Christ comes back, it is still a peace that is available to us today. Peace is breaking through. Peace is here now, and yet is still coming fully.

Centuries ago, the Scots or the Welsh, depending on which historian you believe, came up with a prayer. It reads:

***"From ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggedy beasties, And things that go bump in the night, Good Lord, deliver us!"***

Now the odds are the person who first wrote that prayer had never seen any ghoulies or ghosties. Nor is it likely that he or she had any encounters with long-leggedy beasties. Yet, that prayer has survived. It comes down to us partly because the language is so quaint. But that prayer also remains because it touches something deep down inside all of us -- namely, the fear of the unknown and things we can't control.

"From ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggedy beasties, And things that go bump in the night, Good Lord, deliver us!" We don't know what will happen to us tomorrow, and that uncertainty stirs anxiety inside of us.

Our list of fears is long. Doctors (psychologists) call them "phobias." Here are some:

- **Hemophobia:** Fear of **blood**.

- **Monophobia:** Fear of **being alone**.
- **Mysophobia:** Fear of **germs**.
- **Nosocomophobia:** Fear of **hospitals**.
- **Nyctophobia:** Fear of the **dark**.
- **Ornithophobia:** Fear of **birds**.
- **Phasmophobia:** Fear of **ghosts**.
- **Zoophobia:** Fear of **animals**.
- **Veloxrotaphobia:** Fear of **roller coasters**.
- **Kinemortophobia:** Fear of **zombies** (or becoming a zombie)
- **Arachibutyrophobia:** Fear of **peanut butter sticking to the roof of your mouth**.

Our list of fears is long. But at the top of that list for many of us is a fear of the future. The details of tomorrow are unknown to us, and the uncertainty stirs up anxiety inside of us. No matter what we do, we do not have a sure-fire guarantee of what tomorrow holds, and we don't have any protection against tragedies to come. We really don't have control over our lives. And there is nothing we fear more than not being in control.

Psalm 112 is poem that is all about the future. The writer was probably King David. In the Psalm he peers into the unknown and offers bold predictions about what is in store for God's people. And his take on our future is not dark and dismal, but gleaming, radiant, full of bright hope.

God led him to write for us these words, ***“Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever. They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord. Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.”*** Psalm 112:6-8

To people like you who trust in the Lord, God is promising households filled with blessings. Hearts will be overflowing with grace and mercy for others. Hands will be eager to show

generosity. We will be unmoved by the evils of this world, and completely satisfied with knowing God and His blessings. But most of all, he writes that in the future, we will **"have no fear of bad news"** (112:7), and our hearts will be without anxiety over the unknown. He says that we will be **"steadfast, trusting in the Lord"** (112:7). Let that sink in.

David says that in the future, we will not only enjoy material blessing and spiritual maturity, but that we will possess an unshakeable internal peace.

Can you imagine having not even the slightest ounce of fear over bad news?

How can David speak with such joyful certainty about tomorrow? What does he know that we don't? What's the key to inner peace that the rest of us lack?

The answer is found in the psalm before this one. Psalms 111 and 112 are intended to go together. And while 112 looks boldly into the future, Psalm 111 is anchored in the past.

In the Psalm before, David retells, in broad strokes, the history of God's goodness to His chosen people, the Children of Israel. He reminds us that God has a proven record of providing everything for His people -- everything from daily food, clothes, and shelter to meet our most basic needs (111:5). And God has given us food for our souls through his Word (111:7). If that weren't enough, God gave the people back then complete deliverance out of slavery in Egypt, and He protected them from the hand of every other foe they ever faced (111:9). Looking at all that God has done, David can't help but declare, **"Great are the works of the Lord...holy and awesome is his name!"** (v.2, v.9)

This pondering and retelling of God's past faithfulness stirs a sense of fear within David. But it's not a fear of punishment or pain. It's a different kind of fear. David is not scared as he reflects on God's goodness in the past. No, what David is feeling is a kind of awe and respect. It's that kind of fear. He is awestruck at God's goodness. David is humbled. He feels indescribably small as he

considers God's power, and he feels incredibly loved knowing that God uses all that power for our good.

And it's this fear—this deep awe and respect, this mix of humility and honor— this kind of fear propels David into the bold predictions of Psalm 112 and his confident look ahead at tomorrow. It's his fear of the LORD, that is based on God's actual work in the past, that erases David's fear of the future. Fear (respect and awe) of the Lord, erases fear of the future.

And that's it, my friends! David has given us a gift this Christmas! Did you catch it?

**The way forward is backward.** Heading into the future with confidence, with peace, with joy— in spite of all its unknowns— begins by looking backward at the history, the factual events of God's goodness.

The way forward is backward.

**The cure to our fears of tomorrow, is fear of the Lord today.**

It is respect and awe for all that He's done in the past.

As we look back, we remember not so much what God has DONE. But we remember what God DOES. We remember what kind of a loving, forgiving, powerful, faithful God He is!

Let's look backward for a moment. What have we seen God do? Certainly, we could recount all of the awesome acts of the Old Testament. In our personal lives, we could write a long list of every need – big or small -- that God ever met in the years past. We could make a long list of the blessings of each day that we so easily overlook -- like the breath in our lungs, like the clothes on our backs, and the tech in our pockets.

But let's consider the season of Advent that we begin today. What is it that we are anticipating? What good work of God are we rehearsing and reflecting on?

It is an act so breathtaking and overwhelmingly impactful, so generous and loving, that it makes everything David recounted so minor by comparison. It's an event greater than the Ark, greater than the Exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt. It's an event great than

every mighty and good act of God that David recited all combined into one. It's a moment when God gave a gift more personal and a gift with a bigger impact on you than every gasp of air He's ever supplied to you or the daily bread He's ever baked for you.

What are we reflecting on in Advent? You know the answer.

It is God who came to earth for you. It is the same God, whose power and love stir fear and awe in us -- God wrapping Himself in weakness so that He might be near to us. It is God, unwilling to put up with the distance and the dysfunction that separates us, so instead, He bridges the canyon that separates us from Him, and He came to set up camp among us, as one of us. He did it so that He might—through love, and through sacrifice—lay claim to us and guarantee a glorious future for us, a future with Him in heaven in unimaginable joy, and rightness, and purity, and everlasting complete satisfaction. And this is for all!

The eternal, Son of God takes on our flesh and our nature. He became a human. The Creator of the galaxies and universe became a small creature like us. It is what John Owen called "***an incomprehensible work of wisdom, love, and power.***" That is what we reflect on this time of year.

The way forward with peace is looking backward with reverence and awe.

Do you see how amazing this is? Because for most of us people, facing the future means spending countless hours pondering the possibilities and make a plan to protect yourself from the worst-case scenario. We think, "If I can conjure up the awful realities in my head, then I will be prepared when the awful things land in my hands." But ask any anxious person how well that works. Spend too much time fretting over the terrible possibilities of tomorrow, and the only thing you're guaranteed is that you'll be ruined today.

In the comedy movie, "Ferris Bueller's Day Off," the main character, Ferris, has a close friend named Cameron. Ferris is a risk taker. Ferris is happy-go-lucky. Cameron is the opposite. He has no fun. He does nothing he really wants to do. He has no plans for life after high school. Why is he this way? Cameron is filled with

worry. He is afraid of his emotionally distant, over-bearing father, who shows no love to his son. Out of fear, Cameron concocts a plan to take the miles he has driven off the odometer of his father's prized sports car. When his plan doesn't work and he is doomed that his father will find out, he explodes in anger, and the car gets destroyed. He just lived in fear of the future.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that we should not think about the future, and prepare for the future. We should. But there is a difference between preparing for the future and wringing our hands over it as if by doing so, we can control it. We cannot.

If we learn anything from David in these Psalms, it's that the best way to prepare for the future is to anchor ourselves in God's goodness in the past. When we examine the past, we see what God DOES. We then know that our God will be consistent in the future, doing the same kind of powerful and loving things so consistent with His character. The proven pattern of God's activities of yesterday, fill us with peace today, and confidence about tomorrow.

**Our problem, you could say, is that we fear the wrong things.**

We fill ourselves with worry over the unknowns of tomorrow and the result inside us is dread. Instead, God invites you to cram your heart and mind full of wonder and awe— full of holy fear— full of shock at the goodness of the God Who loves you so. When your heart and mind are full of this, then, the fruit you reap is peace in the here and now. This peace is yours today.

What if you chose to reframe the activities of Advent and Christmas? What if you chose to see all your decorating and celebrating, see the advent calendars and church services not merely as acts of nostalgia for yourself, or as things that make great memories for the kids?

**What if you saw all of this season as looking back on Bethlehem and as a means of preparing for your own future?** What if this year this Advent and Christmas become a way of filling

today with confidence in God's goodness, and then confidently trusting that God's goodness will carry into tomorrow?

What if this Advent, with all of the activity that gets packed into this short season – what if it all is an act of investing in how you'll see the future, long after the tree is taken down and the lights come off the house?

This Advent, we look back on the events of Bethlehem with awe and joy so that we can look ahead with lasting peace and enduring hope even after the holidays are over.

Surely, this God, who has done such a marvelous thing in our past by sending his Son to live with us and die for us, can be trusted with our future. God's work in the past opens up the future.

Life is filled with things we can't possibly predict. But take heart: our days of being anxious over the unknown are numbered. This God who arrived in the flesh for you at Christmas is coming again for you in the end, and He reigns over every moment in between.

**The way forward is backward. Fix your eyes on what He's done, and have no fear over what's to come. Amen.**