

*Farragut Presbyterian Church*

*10 AM Traditional Worship*

*December 28, 2025*

*1st Sunday After Christmas*

*Focal Scripture: Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23; Micah 6:6-8*

*Let Fear Fuel a Fire for Justice*

*Sermon by: Mason Warren, Director of Family Ministries*

Before we begin today, I have a confession to make. I am a very devout napper. You can ask anyone who has spent a decent amount of time with me, each and every Sunday after I get home from church, I take my post-church nap. It's rather ironic that I have become such a nap enthusiast given how when I was in Pre-K all those years ago, my mother would consistently receive notes from my teacher telling her that during naptime instead of resting I would choose to talk to the other kids around me, even if they were asleep. But over time, I have come to appreciate the gift of a nap.

The reason I mention this today is because for many people,

naps constitute opportunities to rest and reset for the day ahead,

a chance to recharge one's batteries. Having grown up as the grandson of a preacher and having been in ministry for over a decade, one thing I have learned is that those in ministry have a particularly strong appreciation for naps, especially post Christmas. Many Pastors take some time off immediately following this season, not because they don't love Christmas but because, just like the rest of the world, the buildup to Christmas can often be incredibly depleting. After the Christmas lights come down, after the tree is packed away, after all of our extended family returns home, many of us arrive here tired, physically, emotionally, even spiritually, and in need of a rest.

We often treat Christmas like a finish line, something to be powered through and to recover from and in all honesty our humanity does require of us that time of recovery. However, as theologian Boyung Lee reminds us, "Christmas is not a

conclusion; it is a beginning.” And as many of you already know, beginnings are rarely restful.

Today’s Gospel text puts us directly into the hectic and chaotic world that Jesus Christ was born into. After Mary & Joseph have made this arduous journey, navigated the birth of the one who is the savior of all mankind, after all of the visitors who have come to see the Messiah have left, and it seems like Mary, Joseph, and the little baby Jesus are finally going to be able to find some rest, fear enters into the story. Rest is no longer guaranteed, and fear moves Joseph into action as he seeks to protect his family.

In Matthew 2, we see fear in action from the very start. King Herod is terrified of losing power to this prophesied new king. The fear that has a hold of him drives him towards hatred, manipulation, and ultimately violence. He sets out to do

everything in his power to ensure that he remains on the throne. Herod's actions of hatred and persecution serve as a stark reminder that even with Christ among us, the world is still a broken and dangerous place. However, fear does not have to lead to destruction, instead it can push us towards liberation and faithful action.

Through the angels in his dreams, Joseph is made aware of the immense danger posed to his family and he is told to take his family and flee to Egypt. Joseph's response is one of obedience. He responds not by attempting to take matters into his own hands but instead by simply obeying what God has told him to do. This is an incredibly important distinction for us to make. Fear, although a natural part of human life, can either trap us in a cycle of hate and harm or push us into more faithful action that protects and preserves the life of all God's beloved children.

In our daily lives, we are bombarded with so much negativity, division, and hatred, that it seems only natural to find ourselves in a state of fear. From witnessing the inhumane ways other children of God are being treated to the ways in which we see the world around us coming apart at the seams, fear is a completely understandable reaction.

Yet even in the face of fear, we must continue to ask ourselves what is the faithful response. We must ask ourselves whether we are called to be like King Herod or like Joseph. Now, I will be the first to admit, these questions, while sounding simple, are much harder to answer honestly. While we all want to respond to fear like Joseph, letting our fear fuel us towards obedience, we often struggle to understand what that obedience might look

like, especially since we most likely are not receiving direct instructions from angels in our dreams.

But God is gracious and loving, and God provides guidance for how to live faithfully, even in the midst of fear. As long as we are willing to listen, God shows us the path forward.

Throughout scripture, God has used prophets to guide God's people, calling them to a more faithful relationship even in the midst of fear, uncertainty and chaos. From more familiar stories like Jonah and the whale to the more abstract stories from Ezekiel, prophets have served as guideposts pointing us closer to God. Today's text from Micah continues this tradition, reminding us what we are actually called to do in response to God's love and grace.

In Micah 6:6-8, the prophet poses a question many of us can relate to: “With what shall I come before the Lord?” The people of Israel, wanting to prove their devotion to God, wrestle with what actions to take to rectify the mistakes they have made. It would seem only fair to offer up some form of penitence to God in hopes of forgiveness right? However, Micah reminds God’s people, both then and now, that God only requires something from us that is both incredibly simple but immensely challenging at the same time. God’s desire for us is simply to “seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.” This message is strikingly similar to what we see in Joseph’s response to fear. When danger threatens his family, he acts justly, he focuses solely on protecting his family, he chooses to respond to this threat faithfully rather than anger, he walks humbly with God by trusting God’s guidance rather than taking matters into his own hands. In contrast, we see Herod

completely rejecting God's simple request. Herod rejects justice and persecutes the vulnerable, he allows his fear to fuel hatred and violence, he relies solely upon his own actions to ensure his protection. In Matthew, we see a clear example of what it looks like to live into what Micah has taught us. We see that we have a choice to make, whether to let fear lead us into hatred, harm, and destruction or to allow it to propel us into action, seeking justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God.

So the question remains, what does it actually look like to faithfully respond to fear? We can read scripture all day long and see how those who have gone before us have faced fear. We can read all the psychology and self-help books in the world and see what others around us are trying. But as we see in the Micah text, there is a clear difference between the words we speak and the actions we take. We must not allow ourselves to be people

who educate ourselves about justice but not actively work towards it. If we are to actually live into what the Lord requires of us, to seek justice, to love kindness, to walk humbly with God, we need to do a whole lot more than offer up words of encouragement or support. We as Christians are not simply called to talk the talk but to walk the walk as well. If we are going to say that we follow Christ, to say that we are faithful, we have to accept that the fear that we feel is a natural part of this world and we need to make sure that we use that fear to fuel our desire for justice, mercy, and humble obedience in the world around us. We need to be intentional about not only desiring these things but actively working towards them.

You know, when I was growing up, I had a few fears that held me back. I was terrified of dogs — so much that I wouldn't even go into someone's house if they had one. I was also scared of

heights, and I remember going to Six Flags and not riding any of the roller coasters my friends were on. Looking back, I realize that these fears kept me from experiencing life fully. But over time, I learned to face them, to let the fear that once held me back fuel me instead into action and being more courageous. In doing so I was able to better witness the beauty of God's creation. I was able to experience the joy and unconditional love of dogs, I was able to witness the beauty of the skyline as I reached the peak of a rollercoaster track. All of these things that I had missed out on simply because I let fear hold me back rather than fuel me for the better.

Fear, however, isn't always about harmless things like dogs or heights. It can also shape how we respond to the people around us. As a kid, I was bullied pretty aggressively. I was a scrawny little kid who was awkward and was a bit of a know-it-all and

despite being targeted, I wanted so desperately to fit in with the group of boys who were bullying me. I remember laughing alongside them as they bullied other kids. All because my fear of isolation and being bullied paralyzed me rather than fueling me to stand up for justice. My fear moved me in the wrong direction, and I hurt myself and others in the process.

Fear does not simply limit the joy we experience; it also can limit our ability to act faithfully and share the love of Christ with the world. Micah calls us to channel fear into a desire for justice, kindness, and humility. Joseph felt fear for his family, yet he humbly obeyed God's command. My childhood fears both small and not so small, illustrate an inherent truth: fear is natural, but it can either limit us or fuel us toward faithful action. Just as I learned to let those fears push me into action, Scripture calls us

to confront the fears that paralyze us from acting justly, from showing kindness, or from walking humbly with God.

In a world full of fear, we as Christians are not called to be fearless, but called faithful. We are called to step out of our comfort zone and speak out against injustice and take action through love and kindness, and serving with humility. Faithful action does not mean that fear disappears, it means that fear becomes the fuel for courage, compassion, and justice.

Siblings in Christ, Fear is something we all face. Whether it be big or small, obvious or hidden, fear is a natural part of our lives as humans. It can keep us silent or keep us stuck. It can even push us towards harm, of ourselves and others. But it doesn't have to and we shouldn't let it. As you go throughout this week, I invite you to reflect on what fears in your life may be holding

you back from living faithfully. In what ways are you allowing

your fears to keep you from being a faithful servant of Christ?

How might God be calling you to let that fear fuel you as you

seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God? I

encourage you to embrace your fear, let it push you closer with

God, let it spark a life of justice, kindness, and humility and let it

remind you that God is with you every step of the way. May it

be so. Amen.