

November 30, 2025
First Sunday of Advent
What Do You Fear? Insisting on Hope
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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing unto you, our Rock and our Redeemer.

Our passage from the Greek Testament today begins with the words, “In the days of King Herod...” Those words are fraught. So fraught.

You know how you can communicate sooo much without saying much? You just mention a neighborhood and all sorts of assumptions arise. “Oh, he’s from Beverly Hills...” Or “Well, she went to Lewis & Clark...”. “Yeah, she went to Yale.” We makes assumptions based on a bit of information.

When Luke says, “In the time of King Herod...”, the listener or reader might immediately feel a chill in the room, a tightness in their chest, a sense of unease that is hard to shake. Because that phrase signified so much.

King Herod. He rebuilt the second temple and expanded it—the western wall, often called the wailing wall, is a remaining portion of this. He built the port of Caesarea—including an artificial harbor, an arena, and a hippodrome for chariot races. He built his palace which was astounding—archeologists say it was 180,000 square feet—that’s twice the size of the ballrooms some dream of. He built [aquaducts](#). He sponsored the Olympic games in 12 BC. He accomplished amazing things.

All of this might come to mind when an original reader heard, “In the time of Herod...”

But so would other things. Certainly it would come to mind that this was the leader who, fearing without basis that his favorite wife and three of his sons were plotting his overthrow and/or death, he had their lives ended. And they were in good company.

Herod knew he was not popular, but was determined that his death would be mourned. He planned accordingly, imprisoning important leaders in the hippodrome

and gave orders that immediately following his own death, those leaders were to be exterminated. He knew that people would mourn and wail for them and that would provide a setting of grief at his passing—even if it was not actually him being mourned. As a side note, this order was not carried out.

So when people at the time the gospel was written heard, “In the time of Herod . . . “ all of that would come to mind. They were times that were tense. They were times that were unpredictable. They were times lived under a paranoid leader. They were characterized by rampant oppression, economic disparity, uncertainty, and instability. They were times that were t.e.r.r.i.f.y.i.n.g.

We find ourselves in uncertain times. We find ourselves in uncomfortable times. We wish we could find a button that would allow us to change so many things. To make sure queer people feel safe and have access to healthcare. To ensure immigrants feel safe and thanked for what is often thankless work. To restore the balance of our earth. To bring peace where it is lacking. To make sure no one is hungry or homeless.

Maybe the transitions in staffing here at church are causing you anxiety. You just want to know your community is stable.

Even closer to home, perhaps you wish that button would restore family relationships, undo decisions that have led to seemingly unended debt, to remove addictions, and restore health.

As we enter this advent season, for the next four weeks, our journey will help us look at our fears. Not to cause them to grow. Not because we believe they will magically disappear. And certainly not to cause despair. No, we’re going to look at them because we are a people of hope. We are going to look at them and, in light of the advent story, seek to move through them. We are going to seek to acknowledge our fears while insisting on hope. We are going to seek to acknowledge our fears while insisting on hope. We are going to (let’s say it together) acknowledge our fears while insisting on hope.

Today I want to do something different than I've ever done before. Probably different from anything you've done before. But I knew from before I knew I'd do this job that this would be important for this community.

I invite you to take out post-its that you brought. There were some sitting on chairs if you didn't bring any. Or maybe someone sitting near you can make them available. And I honestly don't know how many you're going to need—maybe 7 or so.

Today we're going to take a step forward to acknowledging our fears or anxieties. And we're going to write those down on these post-its. I'm going to lead us through numerous categories. You can write whatever you want on these. And I'm going to give you some time between each category so you can write. And you can take more time after service to write if you run out of time here.

What fears do you hold about our world?

What fears do you hold for our nation?

What fears do you hold for our state?

What fears do you hold for your city?

What fears do you hold for this Southminster Presbyterian Church community?

What fears do you hold for your family?

What fears do you hold for yourself? For your own life?

I want to end with a quote from the creators of the A Sanctified Art...the authors of the liturgy we will use throughout this season.

Fear can divide and paralyze us, and even be used as a tool for oppression. But what if we formed a different relationship with fear? Can we acknowledge fear without letting it rule us? Might we catalyze our fears into love and action? What if naming our fears helps us see more clearly how God is breaking in and where God is at work?

I invite you to take your post-it notes—and this is an invitation, not an assignment—and put them on the back wall in the narthex. It's not that posting them there will make them dissolve. But maybe you don't have to hold them quite as tightly. Or maybe, having written them down, they won't hold you quite as tightly.

Feel free to put them on that back wall after service, or even during service if that feels freeing to you. And we'll just let them be there for a while, reminding ourselves that our fears are less than our hope. May it be so. Amen.

Benediction

In a fearful world,
may you look for God's spirit.
May you reach for each other's hands.
May you choose courage whenever you can.
And in all things, may you remember
that good news is louder than fear.
In the name of the one who calls,
the one who sends,
and the one who journeys with—
go in peace and
be not afraid.
Amen.