

Pastor's Meditation

Dear friends,

We live in a fearful time. Hardly a week passes without news of more lives lost to gun violence—children in classrooms, worshippers in sanctuaries, neighbors at concerts, friends in shopping malls. These stories of sudden, senseless loss leave us shaken and afraid.

Fear is nothing new. The Bible names it more than 500 times. Today we encounter it not only in shootings, but also in hurricanes and wildfires, in the demonization of immigrants, and in the growing divisions within our communities. I know fear—wondering about the future of the church I love, and fearing for those who may be disproportionately harmed.

Dr. Susan Murray, writing in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, observes that fear behaves like a virus. It spreads quickly -- through conversations, media, even silence. Once present,

it is hard to remove, and if left unchecked, it does terrible harm, especially when mixed with issues of race, privilege, and language. The question is: how do we resist fear?

Living with Fear, Living in Hope

New Testament scholar Richard Hays describes a practice he calls *scriptural imagination*—a way of seeing the world through the lenses of God's Word. This discipline grounds us, reshapes us, and gives us resilience in the face of fear. Scripture not only interprets our reality; it also transforms how we live within it.

The prophet Isaiah knew something of wilderness living, a place of loss, danger, and uncertainty much like our own. Yet even there he proclaimed hope: "*Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear!'*" (Isaiah 35:3–4). Isaiah reminds us that even in desolation, God promises new life: "*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom.*"

Christians—all of us—are called to name our fears honestly and yet live in ways that nurture courage, justice, and connection.

When we gather, we can still speak truth, walk with one another, and ground change in the deeper story of faith—from sin to redemption, from fear to love, from cross to resurrection.

This is not easy work. We carry our personal fears while walking alongside others, all while placing our lives within God's greater promise of love and justice. The call is clear: take responsibility, see ourselves connected to one another, share resources with those harmed the most, and live into our vocations "for such a time as this."

As traumatic as this season has been, I have heard pastors say after leading prayer, standing with neighbors for justice, or proclaiming hope in worship, "*I don't know where this is going, but I feel energized. This is what God called me to do.*"

Fear spreads like a virus. And Scripture gives us the antidote in hope. By living into our callings and standing together, we can move from fear toward healing, courage, and joy.

Join me "living with fear, yet living in hope" this Stewardship and Fall season.

Pastor Peter