

FEAR NOT!

Fear is a natural God-given emotion. It is a natural reaction to something or someone who may threaten to harm us. Fear can protect us.

Some fear, however, is not good or healthy. This is unholy fear. As followers of Jesus Christ, we should not fear the things in this world that unbelievers do. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). When I think about unholy fear, I am reminded of a great song from the Veggie Tales children videos. The song is meant to instruct children not to be afraid, but rather to trust God for his provision and protection. The heart of the song goes, "God is bigger than the boogey man, He's bigger than Godzilla and the monster on TV!" God *is* bigger than anything that may try to come against us.

Weeks ago now, I and several others from the Vestry, went to meet and to talk with the Comptroller of our Diocese of Maryland, Karen Stewart. We met with her to discuss St. Andrew's financial situation. It was a positive and encouraging meeting and conversation. As the Pastor of St. Andrew's the primary thing I left the meeting with was the idea that we should *not be afraid*. Rather, we should actively exercise our faith and trust in God. We should not be afraid of our current financial state. I was even gently encouraged to preach a couple of sermons about not being afraid. In our case, and often in this life, we are tempted to be afraid, to give into unholy fear. But to give into unholy fear means that we are *not trusting God* to provide for us and to protect us. Even when our negative situation is our fault, God can still provide, protect and rescue us. God has all the resources of this world in his hands. God generously provides. He lovingly protects. And the Lord powerfully rescues us.

St. Andrew's current financial challenges are real, and they are serious. Life for our church family will need to change, and is already changing, significantly. We are going to have to do without a number of things which we have taken for granted. We need to tighten our belt and live more faithfully within our means. We need to be better



stewards of all the resources the Lord has generously entrusted to us. Again, all this is real and serious. BUT... we still do *not* need to be afraid. God is with us, maybe even closer with us. Now is the time to exercise our faith in the Lord. Now is the time to trust the Lord even more.

I have to admit that it has been a stressful and difficult time for me and our family. I, however, have not given into despair over our current financial challenges. I strongly believe that God will even bless us out of this situation. The situation has served as a wake up call of sorts to our congregation. Our Vestry is praying and working harder together to keep our life and ministries and mission going. We have formed a Fundraising Committee to get us moving toward creative ways to raise needed money together.

For St. Andrew's Church family I am clinging to the promise of God straight from his Word in the Bible, "I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future," (Jeremiah 29:11). God has good things in store for us!

We will all experience different emotions at this challenging time. But I encourage you: please do not give into despair. Do not give into discouragement.

It's been said that, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." When the going gets tough for Christians we too need to work even harder, pray even harder, give even more, and trust God more deeply. Let us work, pray, and give to build up St. Andrew's church family, our mission, and His ministries! Let us trust to Lord to direct us and to provide for us all the way.

Let us press ahead to do whatever God calls us to do, and to be whatever God directs us to be, all for his great glory and to the blessing of others.

Peace, love, and joy to you and yours in Jesus,
Father Shawn +