



November 30 – Walking in the Dark

When I was almost 9 years old, we moved to Forest City. The house we moved into was designed by my parents. One of the features they were most proud of is that we did not need any windows in the basement. There were two sets of stairs. That sounds great. Less potential for leaks and the like. However, there was one major hiccup in those plans. When the power went out, it was very very dark.

The first time that I was in the basement when the power went out, I am thankful no one could see what happened. I panicked. It was pitch black. I could not see anything, yet still started running. I ran into walls, objects, stubbed a toe. It was when I ran into the piano that I knew where I was and could find the stairs...climbing to the safety of the main floor and a little bit of light through the windows.

The second time was different. I stayed still with my eyes wide open until the eyes adjusted. It took a little time to adjust. Little by little the room came into focus. I could not see everything, but I could see enough to calmly walk to the stairs. On a different occasion, someone came downstairs with a flashlight. As my eyes were adjusting. The light was piercing and painful.

“in the time of King Herod” set the tone for this encounter with Zechariah. These are dark times under an oppressive regime. Herod might have been a puppet king, answering to Rome, but don’t let that fool you. It was a time filled with fear, heavy taxation, and punishment for any who dared to oppose the King. This was a dark time. Then you add the reality of longing for a child, the pain of seeing others with growing children and wondering why you are not able.

Into this dark time, this angel appears to Zechariah. The word used to describe Zechariah’s fear is that of physically trembling. It is a painful and scary experience. I wonder how much Zechariah was able to fully understand in the moment. It is like that flashlight piercing the darkness, leaving the body overwhelmed by the sudden change.

There is a change in Zechariah. Now there is hope. It is not something that is seen right away. It will take time before there are the visible signs within Elizabeth. Due to Zechariah’s doubts and fears, he is unable to speak until after the birth of their child. Yet, something is different. They have hope.

The angel does not dismiss Zechariah’s fears. The fear is real. What happens is reorientation in the presence of fear. The angel plants the seed of hope and allows it to grow. Zechariah changes. Fear and hope walk side by side.

This life through hope changes everything. In a few months, Mary will visit. Their son, John, will become a voice in the wilderness, preparing the way for Jesus. The work of Zechariah and Elizabeth, in many ways, paves the way for the whole narrative of Jesus. It does not say that they directly witnessed any of this coming to fruition. It only shares how hope changed the way they lived, and in faith, how they guided others.

Our world is filled with fears. Some of them so deep and present that it feels scary to say them out loud. Some are so deep we are fearful of even admitting them inside our own hearts. We can try to avoid them in the hope that they go away. It doesn’t work. The path forward is often by facing these fears. And as we find ways to acknowledge the fears, they have less power over us. Then as we face them, in small steps, we find a path through them.

So, how do we find our reorientation? How do we learn to live a life of hope in the presence of fears? I am going to leave you with an image, the pirate and the patch over one eye. The reason pirates would wear a patch over one eye is because one eye would fully dilate. When they went into the belly of a ship, they could switch the patch to the other eye and see clearly. The way to seeing hope is not in looking only at our joys. It is looking at our doubts and fears, and seeing God is there too. Then we start to see God everywhere. Amen

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