

First United Methodist Church

310 North Rowley, Mitchell, SD 57301

Rev. Keith Nelson, Lead Pastor

keith@mitchellfumc.org

605.630.6586

This past week our church has begun the “Unafraid” study. This study and sermon series, will take us through Rev. Adam Hamilton’s book entitled “Unafraid.” I feel this is such a timely study for our church family because fear and anxiety seem to be such a constant reality in our world, in our nation, and therefore in our lives. The “Unafraid” study is intended to help us live our lives not overwhelmed by fear but by resting confidently in the love and strength of our faith in God. Each week we’ll have a Bible verse to memorize so when the pressures of life, the pressures of fear arise, the verses can provide a calming or a different perspective than that of the world we live in.

This week’s Memory Verse is Philippians 4:4-7. “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

In this reflection I want to take a closer look at several words that jump out at me from the passage.

“Rejoice” Why would a verse that speaks of the reality of anxiety also contain the word “Rejoice?” The word means “to be in a state of gladness,” sort of the opposite of anxiety. Though anxiety can be all-consuming of one’s thoughts and attention in life, so can gladness. We all have a choice to make. Are we going to allow fear and anxiety to control our minds and our hearts, or will we allow gladness that place of honor? Yes, it can be a challenge to do so, but gladness is the better choice.

“Gentleness” One of the side effects of anxiety and fear in society is that it tends to bring out a “darker” side of humanity. There tends to be more argumentativeness, more contentiousness, more incivility when anxiety is present. This is exactly why “gentleness” is the order of the day. It has a calming and positive effect in life.

“Thanksgiving” Paul is speaking of the continual choice we have as to what we’re going to focus on in life. “but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Again, it’s hard for fear and anxiety to take over when thanksgiving and gratitude fills one’s thoughts and one’s heart.

“Peace” This word isn’t about a lack of war or violence in life or in the world. It’s so much more than that. It brings an understanding of harmony and tranquility. The word Shalom, or wellbeing, captures the spirit of what is being expressed. This peace isn’t something we can create or generate. It is a gift from God.

“Guard” Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison. It is likely that a guard was either chained to him or standing nearby. The guard made sure Paul stayed put, but was also there to protect him from potential outside threats.

There are other great words in this verse too, but what really captures my heart is each of us having a choice in what we’re going to focus on in life. Plus, God’s peace is able to “imprison” or guard our hearts from the threats that fear and anxiety stir up. May we put all these words, and the entire passage, to work in our lives as we seek to live by faith and not by fear. “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

Serving Together,
Pastor Keith