Exodus 14:10-14, Luke 12:1-7

“No fear in each one reaching one”

 Let me begin this Sunday by saying thank you for allowing me to have a week away and spend it with my family. Also a special thanks to Dr. Wilson not only for his service as an interim pastor nearly 5 years ago, but also for being willing to step in this past Sunday and share the Good News with you.

 Last Sunday I worshipped at the Lancaster Quaker meeting house and then from there went to a hunting cabin in the woods. I don’t hunt, but what a joy it was to be in silence in God’s creation sitting in a tree stand for 8 hours. You all are teaching me some things, two weeks ago I experienced my first Penn State football game, last week was a hunting cabin. You know, the Bronkemas are in the midst of looking for a car and I get a feeling we don’t have a choice as to what kind of car it is going to be. It has to be a pickup truck. We are predestined for it.

 No fear, that’s what we are addressing today and will be addressing through the entire Advent season. All throughout Scripture we find time after time that once people have an encounter with God that their first reassurance that they hear is No fear, do not be afraid. We hope that every single Sunday you experience our loving Savior in such a way that when you leave you will be fearless. The more you expose yourself to life and other people and other cultures and other nationalities the less you fear others. Likewise, our premise for today is that the more you rely on God the less fearful you are in life regardless of the situation that you are facing.

 Advent, this first Sunday is a time of preparation for the second coming of our Savior Jesus Christ. We believe that he is going to come again. Our hope is found in nothing less, and a sign that we are prepared for his coming is to what extent do we live our lives without fear because the foundation of our life is Jesus Christ.

 One way, and certainly not the primary way, but one way that our fear is often manifested, especially those of us who are mainline Christians, is to fail or to be afraid to invite others to hear about Jesus the Savior. Think about it. When was the last time that you invited one of you friends who doesn’t go to church, to church? Some of you are saying, I do it all the time. Well, this Advent season you will have an opportunity to prove it. We’ll talk about that later.

 Both of our Scriptures today deal with people of God facing their fear and being lead to a different place by the powerful presence of God. Let’s learn from that today and for the rest of the season.

 **READ**

I guess I need to confess a fear that I have that is going to manifest itself this week and is going to be real for the next few months. I’ve been told, but I don’t believe a word of it, that I’m a bit competitive. Now, I’m sure that’s no true, but what I do know is that I have three girls all of whom are playing basketball for LMH. Rachel is on varsity, Naomi on JV, and Bethany on the 9th grade team. I’m told that I get a bit animated during the games, Dave Russell, no need to interject here, and I’m just not sure that I’m going to make it through the season with three games. You just may be reading about me in the paper.

 In our Old Testament lesson, let’s turn there, we find the basic premise for all the other Scriptures that follow which deal with fear. In every situation where people are facing a crisis laden with danger and the potential for disaster and pitfalls the assurance to have no fear finds its center in the words of this Scripture.

 Let’s set the context. The Israelites had rushed out of their houses in Egypt where they were slaves and pushed their way forward into the desert to get as far away as possible from Pharoah andtheir slavery. But they turn around and see the Egyptians bearing down on them and their fear is palpable and verbalized by the people. In vs. 10 we find the Scripture tells us: In great fear they cried out. Then in vs. 11 we hear them say: What have you done to us? So often in fear our first response is to lash out and blame someone else for the impending doom on the unresolved issue that we are confronting, or the life situation that changes everything about your present.

 Think of the last crisis that you faced. Was your first reaction to place blame and thereby make yourself feel somewhat vindicated and safe in some way? But Moses instead of panicking offers words of hope and life and these words will carry us through for the entire Advent season. Ready people for your underline verse. Listen to what he says: “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today.” Are you afraid, are you alone, are you dreading this holiday season, do you fear the swirling number of appointments and things that are filling up your calendar and the number of things that have to get done in the next few weeks. Close your eyes, I know some of you have your eyes closed. Close your eyes and listen if you feel afraid and overwhelmed, hear these words from God and then open them and have no fear: “ Do not be afraid , stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today.”

 Every Sunday we should put a sign on these exits that have this verse. “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today.” The premise that we find in Scripture this Sunday and every Sunday is to have a firm solid trust that deliverance is from the Lord so you can live without fear.

 Let’s look at our New Testament Scripture, and it really doesn’t present fearlessness in the same clear way that we find in Exodus, so you’re going to have to work a little bit to stay with me here. The context for Jesus’ words can be found in the previous chapter, if you have your Bibles turn there now. Jesus has been invited to the house of a Pharisee and he goes. While there he speaks very, very harshly against all the religious leaders, the scribes, Pharisees, teachers of the law, Sadduccees. He calls them fools. This tends to resonate with the people there because when we pick up in chapter 12 it begins by saying outside of this house there were thousands of people out there. The literal Greek is 10,000.

 So in a way Jesus’ words to his disciples in these verses are primarily to be aware of the Pharisees and is a very populist message that saw these religious leaders as the root of a lot of evil. In vs. 1 he tells his disciples to beware of the yeast of the Pharisees. We know what yeast is right? I’m not an expert, but I’ve read up on it, and supposed it is a substance that is somewhat corrupted and as a result when it finds itself in dough will expand and grow to an amazing proportion. Right, somewhat? You get the point. Just a little bit of yeast can cause a huge growth and swelling. What is the yeast of the Pharisees that Jesus warns his disciples to beware of? We can make up some analogies, but we actually have the answer in Matthew 16:5-12. Turn to it if you have it. You can skip ahead to verse 12 where we read that the yeast of the Pharisees was actually their teaching.

 Beware of false teaching, Jesus is telling his disciples. Beware of anyone who tells us to put your trust in rules or laws instead of the living Jesus Christ. Beware of the message of culture that teaches you that Jesus is a crutch and you can rely on yourself for all things. You’ve seen how far that has taken you. Beware of the teaching that might makes right and draws you away from a deliverance that comes from the Lord and only from the Lord.

 Jesus uses this word fear after lambasting the Pharisees in relationship to what our Scripture defines as hell. Fear those who can kill your body and then kill your soul as well, is what Matthew states. The Greek for hell here, Gehenna, was literally the name of the valley between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem. In the days of Jeremiah that valley was used for child sacrifices. Later it was used as a garbage heap that would be smoldering and burning pretty much 24 hours a day. It was considered the armpit of the world, a bit like New Jersey, wait, did I say that?

 Jesus states to fear the one who can send you to hell. Who has the power to send you to hell? The devil? No, we are told to resist the devil in James 4:7 and in I Peter 5:9, not to fear him. In the face of evil and in the face of the devil we are to have no fear. He can try to tempt us with false teachings and try to draw us away from God because of our desires. But there is only one person who if he so chose, could ever send you to hell. Who is that? The very same person who sent his Son to die for our sin. Do you think He would ever do that.

 But that isn’t Jesus’ point here. Jesus is telling us that at the center of our fearlessness has to be a healthy fear of the Lord. What does Proverbs 1:7 tells us? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. When you turn your back on Jesus, you are merely displaying an incredible arrogance and ignorance in not fearing the Lord. The only way we can live our lives without fear, hear me well on this one, is if we fear our God who showed his love for us in sending his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus gives us assurances in vs. 7 that if we fear the Lord then he will care for us and never forget us. He cares for the sparrows and he will care for you regardless of how much hair you have on your head.

 But vs. 6 lifts up a fear that many have over this time of year. There is a fear of being forgotten. Many have that fear. This is also the time of year that as a pastor I record the most number of complaints and the highest level of discontent expressed. Without fail when Advent begins I can count on quite a few intense complaints. Fear finds itself a fertile field in this time of year, and the church is not immune to it. Also, fear marks our culture like it never has in the past. Since 9-11 our country has been making decisions based on reactions to terrorism and the fear of what might happen. That goes contrary to our nature and contrary to who we are as Christians.

 Now to implementation of living without fear. As a sign of having no fear is to face a fear that many of us have. Each week I’m going to give you homework to face your fear head on, whatever that one fear may be. The project this week will last for the rest of the year. Every single one of you has a friend, a neighbor, a family member who does not attend church anywhere. For Advent, your homework is for each one of you to reach one of them.

 I will be checking on your homework on a weekly basis. We will welcome newcomers at the beginning of the service and you get to show off your prize and show us that you’ve done your homework. See, I told you I’m not competitive. The church is not a place where if you build it and open the doors then they will come. That is not who we are. But rather if you invite them they will come.

 A sing of no fear and maturity is being able to reach out to others to invite them to share in the same love and joy that you are experiencing here at First Presbyterian. No fear, have no fear, for today, you will see the deliverance of the Lord. Amen.