But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—*I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people*: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.  (Lk.2:10-11)

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields…an angel appeared to them, and they were terrified. That’s the setting, that’s the context for all that will come next. In that region there were shepherds, keeping watch over their flocks, and as the glory of the Lord came down around them, they were terrified.

I feel like that sometimes. Like a shepherd, keeping watch over a flock, whether it’s my vocation as spouse, parent, son, or this call to ministry and a vocation to share and serve. And sometimes, I’m terrified. Not so much because I see angels, or ghosts. Just terrified by what we see all around us, the brokenness in community, families, and individuals. Terrified by the ways we humans hurt one another, the ways we divide and conquer. So sometimes, as we shepherd and care for others, those around us, those we love, including our neighbors, we become afraid.

“But…”

“But…” the scripture continues. “But the angel said…” The angel does not leave the shepherds in fear and anxiety. The angel does keep the shepherds wanting or waiting, left wondering what is happening. “But…” is the hinge of this happening, it moves fear forward.

“But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.”

Good news of great joy! This good news of great joy has the power to drive away fear. This good news of great joy accompanies us when we are grieving or lost and strengthens us for the journey. The good news of great joy stirs our hearts and activates us for the sake of one another, our neighbors, and those we haven’t yet met.

This good news of great joy connects to our own stories. We hear God’s story in our own lives, and it becomes a word that we have to share.

It has been an anxious time. We are still grieving. Many have, and continue, to experience deep trauma. But…

A Word comes to us to remind us of this gift of great joy.

It has been my privilege and honor to witness in these last four months the many and various ways our church – gathered in 160 distinct communities – shares this liberating, salvific love with the world. As church together, we are actively engaged in worship, evangelism, hunger ministries, school partnerships, advocacy, education, mentoring, supporting refugees, serving migrant families, climate care, anti-racism, gender justice, support of people living without a home, and those who are incarcerated. As church together, WE share this good news of great joy to others who live with fear.

Thanks be to God for you. Thank you for the ways you practice generous love, and for the joy you share with a whole world in need.

May God bless you and your faith community, and all God’s people.

In the Joy of Christmas,

Bishop Lee M. Miller II