

Rev Rita's Message – Sunday May 4 – 2020

The song “Whistle A Happy Tune” is from one of my favorite musicals “The King and I.” The storyline is based on the memoirs by Anna Leonowens who was a governess to the children of the King of Siam in the early 1860's. In Victorian England, a widow like Anna with a young child was expected to live a quiet life either returning to her parent's home or remarrying. Instead, Anna faces her fears to sail around the world on an adventure that would forever change her.

We all have fears. What are you afraid of? Terrified of creepy-crawlers? Scared of slithering serpents? This week I came across one survey that said that the top ten fears that people have are: the dark, going to the doctor, thunder and lightning, dogs, flying on an airplane, mice, needles and getting shots, spiders, being closed in a small space, heights, public speaking, and snakes. For many people today, I am pretty sure that covid-19 would be at the top of that list.

The emotion of fear can actually be beneficial to us. It can alert us to situations that may be harmful. It helps us prepare for a situation that may arise so that we can respond. However, fear can also be detrimental and diminish our lives.

In the Bible, God says hundreds of times in hundreds of ways “Be not afraid. Fear not.” The Lord is My Shepherd, psalm 23, is just one example. I think the words of this psalm come from the writer's experience that fear happens and that fear can be managed by relying on God who is always present and protective whether a situation is safe or whether it is threatening. The writer is confident that when the world becomes a frightening place, it becomes less frightening when we know that God is here with us.

In 1981, Rabbi Harold Kushner became a bestselling author with his book “When Bad Things Happen to Good People.” It is still a very good read. He also wrote a book “The Lord is My Shepherd: Healing Wisdom of the Twenty-Third Psalm.” It is also a very good read.

In that book, Kushner writes that the 23rd psalm offers us a way of seeing the world that renders it less frightening. It shows us how to recognize the presence of God at times and in places where we might think God was absent or when we might be so distracted by our fears that we would overlook God's presence. It has the power to teach us to think differently and, as a result to act differently. It teaches us to look at the world we live in clearly and without illusions, but at the same time to see it as a world in which we can live courageously, doing good for ourselves and others.

Perhaps today is a day when fear rests heavily upon you. Certainly we will all face fears at one time or another in the future. Perhaps whistling a happy tune will ease many a fear that you have. And most certainly God will always be there helping us to be not afraid.

May God go before you to lead you.

God go behind you to protect you.

God go beneath you to support you.

God go beside you to befriend you.

Do not be afraid.

May the blessing of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be upon you.

Do not be afraid.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Amen.