“The Gift of Releasing Fear”

Luke 2:1-20

Rev. Rebecca Weaver Longino

First Presbyterian Church, Luling, TX

December 24, 2015

One of my favorite ways to prepare for Christmas is enjoying those classic movies that air every year.

*Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer, How the Grinch Stole Christmas, It’s a Wonderful Life.*

And of course, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

That sweet little movie that has been around for decades.

I think I like this one so much, because it’s so relatable.

It starts out with Charlie Brown, lamenting about how no one likes him.

How he just doesn’t understand the joy of Christmas.

He trudges through the snow, being mocked by other children as he goes.

He approaches Lucy for advice, dropping a nickel into her money can.

Lucy tells him they need to figure out the source of his fears in order to find a solution.

They decide he has pantophobia, the fear of everything.

She tells him the cure is to get involved in something Christmasy.

So she recruits him to direct their Christmas play.

Charlie Brown hesitantly agrees and when he shows up to the auditorium, he finds chaos.

Lucy helps get everyone in line and hands out the scripts.

There’s a lack of spirit on stage, so Charlie Brown sets out to find a Christmas tree to help liven the mood.

He returns with a sad little tree, which the other children make fun of him for.

They mock him, saying he doesn’t understand what Christmas is about.

Leaving Charlie Brown to feel even more down than before.

But then, Linus steps up and says he knows what Christmas is really about.

Cuing the lights to dim, he recites his lines for the play, which come from Luke chapter 2.

He speaks about the shepherds in the field, and the angel telling them of the child that has been born.

The same story we heard just a moment ago.

Now, I’ve watched this film more than a dozen times, but there is a key detail I had missed until a friend pointed it out to me this year.

When Linus gets to the line “Fear not! For behold, I bring tidings of great joy which will be to all people.”

At the moment he says “Fear not!” he drops his security blanket.

This isn’t just some slip up, an error on the part of the animators.

It’s an intentional moment where Linus lets go of that beloved security blanket, the one he never goes anywhere without.

He lets go of his fear.

Then he turns to Charlie Brown and says “that is what Christmas is all about.”

Of course, Linus picks up his blanket as soon as his monologue is over.

But, at the end of the cartoon, the children all gather around the beautifully refurbished Charlie Brown tree.

They sing a hymn and share a moment of recognizing the true meaning of Christmas.

And in that moment, Linus once again parts with his security blanket, when he tenderly wraps it around the base of the tree.

He symbolically lays his fears before God, allowing God to keep them.

And we don’t see Linus pick up his blanket again.

Now that I’ve realized this profound message of Linus’ blanket, the story from Luke has taken on a whole new meaning for me.

That line “Fear not!” now stands out more than ever before.

If Linus can drop his security blanket, something he never does any other time, surely we can release the fears that bind us.

Surely we can be like Linus, and let go of that false sense of security.

When we hear this Christmas story from Luke chapter 2, we can be assured that Christ comes for us to take away all of our fears.

Whether we fear that no one likes us, as Charlie Brown fears.

Whether we fear what tomorrow may bring.

Whether we fear what’s happening in the world today.

All of these fears are taken on by Christ our Lord.

The one who comes to offer the gift of releasing fear.

Of taking away our anxieties and reassuring us that we are in his care.

Reassuring us that God is with us always.

The birth of Jesus invites us to drop those blankets full of false security, and instead cling to him.

Nothing that causes us fear stands a chance against God, creator of all things.

In Christ, we find the deepest truth.

We find peace.

We find security.

Author and poet Madeleine L’Engle, articulates this well in her poem “First Coming”

She writes:

He did not wait till the world was ready,  
till men and nations were at peace  
He came when the Heavens were unsteady  
and prisoners cried out for release.  
  
He did not wait for the perfect time.  
He came when the need was deep and great.  
He died with sinners in all their grime,  
turned water into wine. He did not wait  
  
till hearts were pure. In joy he came  
to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.  
To a world like ours, of anguished shame  
He came, and his Light would not go out.  
  
He came to a world which did not mesh,  
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.  
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh  
the Maker of the stars was born.  
  
We cannot wait till the world is sane  
to raise our songs with joyful voice,  
for to share our grief, to touch our pain,  
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

Friends, we can trust that Christ comes at just the right time.

To release us from the fears that bind us.

To bring us comfort and joy.

Alleluia, Amen![[1]](#footnote-1)

1. Jason Soroski’s article at <http://www.crosswalk.com/special-coverage/christmas-and-advent/just-drop-the-blanket-the-moment-you-never-noticed-in-a-charlie-brown-christmas.html> was immensely helpful in crafting this sermon. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)