

# Calling All Angels



*An Advent Study  
of Fearlessness and Strength*

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**WJK** WESTMINSTER  
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*For Grace Immanuel,  
the most fearless church I know*

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*Calling All Angels* provides a wealth of resources for group study and worship for the Advent season. To enhance your use of this book, digital resources, including images for displaying during worship services or group sessions, a Spotify playlist, and chapter introductions from the author are available at [www.wjkbooks.com/CallingAllAngels](http://www.wjkbooks.com/CallingAllAngels).

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# INTRODUCTION



“Do not be afraid.”  
It’s the most frequently repeated message in Scripture.

Some say it appears 365 times, to be exact. That sounds a bit too much like a marketing team decided they’d found a great idea for a Christian daily devotional . . . one text a day for a calendar year, what are the odds!?

But even if the actual math is not quite that convenient, some variation of “fear not” really does come up more than three hundred times in the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation; from the prophets to the psalms; from Jesus to the faithful ones who followed, the words have become a mantra across time and space. Clearly faith cannot thrive when fear is in charge. Maybe that’s why some of the most awe-inspiring expressions of this message appear in the Gospel stories leading

up to Jesus' birth. Angelic beings appear several times preceding the nativity story to those who are awaiting this blessed event—whether they know it or not yet—and each time, the angels bear the same memo: do not be afraid. The primary origin story of our faith insists and relies on this compelling refrain: let go of your fear, and amazing things will follow.

Years ago, I attended a leadership event where the facilitator started out with a simple question for the participants to discuss in small groups: What would you do if you weren't afraid?

The exploration of that question turned out to be a game changer in my life—for the space of that event and ever since. In the years since that gathering, I have held up that same question, for myself and for others, in various contexts. In a moment when the path forward doesn't seem clear, when there seems to be no right answer, or when my own wisdom is obviously insufficient, to begin from a place of fearlessness almost always provides a turning point, even if that courage is hypothetical at first! Whether in a professional, personal, communal, or spiritual setting, asking ourselves what we'd do if we were truly unafraid provides a filter that can distill even the most difficult moment of stuckness to a moment of truth.

The trick is that you can't begin to answer that question until you first start naming what you are afraid *of*. It's amazing how much power fear can hold over a person or institution if that fear has never been acknowledged or articulated. But once you start to get to the root of what fears have been calling the shots, you can decommission them. And then the whole sky opens up.

Considering the number of biblical reminders on the topic, perhaps people of faith should adopt this as our leading question for all of life: What would we do if we weren't afraid? What would change in our relationships, in our vocations, in our congregations—maybe even in our communities and in our world—if God's people led with a courage and vision that was always, first and foremost, unafraid? If we could not be bullied by bigots or confined by the bounds of capitalism? If we were undeterred by threat of violence or rumors of war? If the suffering of the world never sent us into petrified despair, but only ever inspired us to courageous action?

With some intention on our part, the Advent season can be a time of manifesting that kind of transformational courage. Where better to find the strength, hope, and fearlessness than in the lives of those who first witnessed the coming of Christ?

In these iconic episodes leading up to Jesus' birth, angels visit trembling mortals (who, to be fair, are having a totally normal human reaction to an encounter with otherworldly beings). The angels offer those mortals a glimpse of the new, world-changing thing that God is about to do, and then they invite said mortals to participate in this story in some way.

Who is on the receiving end of these Advent tidings?

- An aged priest who—impossibly—is about to become a father for the first time.
- A young woman who is about to become a mother, without the safety and protection of marriage.

- A simple carpenter who is asked to do the unconventional, the unthinkable, the impossible— setting aside everything he knows about family, values, and life.
- A group of ordinary shepherds who are just out minding their ordinary sheep—and about to get the extraordinary fright of their lives!

Into each of these human stories comes an in-breaking of some fearful reality. But over each of them, the same call is spoken or sung: *do not be afraid*.

In theory, that is wonderfully comforting and empowering. In practice, of course, we know from our own experience that it is easier said than done. Some quick doomscrolling in the morning with our coffee reminds us just how much there is to fear: how much uncertainty, how many enemies, how little truth, and how deep the mistrust of our neighbors.

The imminent dangers of climate change are real. The escalating gun violence and the duplicitous politicians are real too. So are the global conflicts, the refugee crisis, the growing gap between rich and poor, and the increased frequency and severity of natural disasters. Pile these onto our own addictions, struggling relationships, difficult jobs, and health challenges and we may find ourselves wondering: *Where are our angels?*

The angels of the biblical Christmas story too often become relics of a romanticized past and a nostalgia-heavy holiday culture. They are the things of Hallmark cards, TV musicals, church Christmas pageants, and your country mamaw's



wall decor. No offense intended—I love a country mamaw and everything about her—but somewhere along the way, we’ve diminished the power of that angelic voice with our seasonal renderings. We cherish angels among the cast of nativity characters, but do we perhaps fail to hear their call—*do not be afraid!*—as the declaration of resistance that it is? Their ancient chorus is not just a gentle reminder but a firm command, one that is not to be ignored but most definitely needs to be reckoned with.

The world needs that timeless message of courage more than ever, rearranged for a new season, turned up and tuned in to the needs of this moment. Surely the pervasive call of “fear not” that rings throughout the whole arc of Scripture still echoes today.

Historically, fear has often been wielded as a weapon by insecure faith leaders. The language of sin and judgment, alongside images of a vengeful God, can serve as both a recruiting tool and a manipulative means of control. As people leave organized religion in droves, we are seeing the tragic fallout of this “brand” of faith. People are reckoning with the trauma wrought by toxic theology and realizing that they would rather live unafraid than bound by the ancient tropes of church. The irony is that the Christian faith actually contains within its narrative the power to dismantle and dispel all fear! Fearless faith can transform lives, and the world. This is the true spirit of the gospel of Jesus Christ: healer, liberator, and miracle worker.

In anticipation of Christ’s birth, we gather around the stories that have empowered generations of faithful witnesses to that liberating love.

In the face of the fearful uncertainty of the modern world, we will rally with the courage and strength that the gospel has always contained. In the hopeful spirit of Advent, we will hear and repeat the angels' invitation for our time. The sacred call and response appears in Scripture often enough that we should understand the assignment by now. "Do not fear" is not just a comforting phrase; it is an invitation and a commissioning.

Once we begin the work of Advent, we become Advent *people*: people of good faith who acknowledge the deep anxiety of the world, and of our time in particular. People aware of the source of deep human fear but never bound by it, present to the suffering and need of the world but not crippled by its enormity. Advent people are rooted in reality but live as those who've been fearlessly empowered by the Spirit to be justice-seeking, peace-loving witnesses to the new thing God is doing in creation.

How will we spend these days of waiting for Christ to be born among us? If we answer the angels' call, we will spend this time acting on our hope and not our fear. We will proclaim peace when the world shouts its collective anxiety. We will live joyfully undeterred by the powers of evil and always, always embody love instead of letting that four-letter f-word lead the way.

You know the one: fear.

I pray that these Advent reflections will serve as a resource for your courageous living. Each chapter features a thematic introduction for the week based on the story of an angelic encounter surrounding the birth of Jesus, followed by questions for personal reflection or group discussion,

an activity suggestion, and five daily reflections. There is also a Christmas chapter with questions for your personal reflection or journaling, but there are no daily reflections for that week. At the end, you'll find liturgy content, including original readings for Advent candle lighting and Christmas Eve. And because this season calls for music, there is a suggested playlist—which I suggest you check out sooner than later—to provide a soundtrack for the journey. See page 139 and visit <https://spoti.fi/3K230It>.

May this journey toward fearlessness help you find hope, peace, joy, and love along the way, and may you share it with a neighbor or a stranger. May the skies open up as you wait for God to do a new thing, in your life and in the world.

But first, take just a moment and ask yourself: What would you do if you weren't afraid?

## FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT



### *Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent*

**W**e are socially programmed to fear silence. Awkward silence in a conversation? Fill it with an even more awkward joke or inappropriate comment! What about the silence of an empty house: Can we be still and enjoy it, or do we suddenly remember the hundred things we have to do or, maybe, go and buy? A quick scroll of the newsfeed (which, if we're being honest, is rarely a quick scroll at all) is filled with sound-bite boobytraps just waiting to interject a loud and jarring interruption into our meeting or worship service, revealing that we've been on our phone when perhaps we shouldn't be. Endless reels intrude with the sudden noise of advertising, social commentary, cooking, or funny animal videos unless we remember to hit the mute button in time.

In the same vein, it seems we've effectively filled the silences of nature with the sounds of construction and traffic. In fact, in certain seasons, the most

beautiful natural spaces imaginable are the ones most full of people and cars! Yosemite, the Grand Canyon, the beach, any local or state wonder designated as an area of refuge . . . you can enjoy the views, but prepare to enjoy them with a few thousand of your closest friends and their vehicles.

My home state of Kentucky boasts the natural wonder that is Mammoth Cave National Park. On a guided walk through the caves, there is a point at which the guide will invite you to stop. The guide will then turn off the light. You have reached a point so deep in the heart of the earth that it is truly and completely devoid of light or sound. The guide will invite everyone to stand still for just a moment and experience the true sensory deprivation of this natural wonder. It is wicked weird. It is also a blessed relief from the chaos of the aboveground world. By the time the guide turns the light back on, you've gotten over the weirdness and might find yourself wishing that you could stay awhile, the ancient limestone walls providing sanctuary from all the noise of your life.

In fact, legend has it that there was a time when local congregations would gather in those rocky depths for their summer worship services. The cave was a great place to keep cool in the days before churches had such a thing as air conditioning. That's how the story goes, anyway: the dark, cool space was inviting enough to entice folks from their labors in the sun and into a place of (blessedly cool) worship. And while I'm sure respite from the heat was a blessing in itself, I'd venture that the sacredness of the space can be attributed most to its silence: a true sanctuary in every sense of the word.

The pervasiveness of sound in the modern age has made us averse to anything resembling true silence. Even when we do seek out a silent sanctuary, we may find that our inner dialogue remains on at HIGH VOLUME, so long has it been since we experienced external quiet. Without any hard data to footnote here, I'm going to venture a hunch that this is largely an adverse effect of late-stage capitalism. The noisier our surroundings, the more likely we are to lose touch with the inner life of the spirit and the more vulnerable we become to engaging in gross consumption. And what's good for commerce is usually terrible for the human spirit.

Enter the prophets of our ancient story, and the prophets of today. Prophets speak truth to power, challenge us to act for justice, and rail against broken systems that harm the vulnerable. They can be loud. But prophets also sometimes invite us to a quieter way. They call us to lean into silence—not just to stop speaking, but to find and embody an inner quiet of the spirit that makes space for transformation.

Some prophets model silence as a spiritual practice. From the desert mothers to more contemporary figures like Thomas Merton, prophetic voices remind us that spiritual practices of prayer and contemplation are essential for the work of justice, calling us back to our humanity when the world has fractured it.

Silence can be an intentional discipline in the life of faith; silence can also be an enforced reality by some circumstance beyond our control. And at times when the spirit is most in need of it, silence might even come by way of divine intervention.

## Zechariah's Angel

In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was descended from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

Once when he was serving as priest before God during his section's turn of duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to offer incense. Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified, and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, "*Do not be afraid*, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children and the disobedient

to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Zechariah said to the angel, “How can I know that this will happen? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.” The angel replied, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.”

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering at his delay in the sanctuary. When he did come out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. When his time of service was ended, he returned to his home.

After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, “This is what the Lord has done for me in this time, when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.”

—Luke 1:5–25; emphasis added

Zechariah is alone in a holy place when Gabriel—the archangel dispatched as messenger of God—appears to him. That backdrop alone is significant. The priest has been sent to perform the ritual burning of incense while the whole assembly prays outside the sanctuary. You can almost hear the stark contrast between the outer world—the



buzz and chatter of a congregation awaiting worship—and the relative dark and stillness of the empty sanctuary just inside the doors.

Having been removed from the crowd, in the silence of that sanctuary, a space has been carved out of ordinary life for Zechariah to have an extraordinary encounter. An angel appears with a life-changing message. This is a recurring theme throughout the Gospel of Luke, as angels appear frequently to announce, instruct, guide, and protect. Though rare in early Judaism, angels became more common in later eras as mediators between God and humans.<sup>1</sup>

It seems that in this case, silence and solitude are almost prerequisites for a significant act of the Holy. Perhaps we can take a hint for today as well: removing oneself from noise and distraction often clears the way for divine encounter.

In the space of that silence, the angel speaks a word of life-changing, unbelievable good news. Zechariah's wife, Elizabeth, will give birth to a child. That's the life-changing part. The unbelievable part is that Elizabeth has long passed what even modern medicine would consider child-bearing age. What the angel proposes is preposterous! Zechariah has some questions, as would anyone.

The news that the angel has just delivered is certainly significant, not just for the lives of Elizabeth and Zechariah, but in the whole arc of the biblical story. Like Sarah and Abraham before them, the couple has waited for many years for God to give them a child. It was a dream long deferred and then abandoned entirely—they had now reached

an age at which it would be impossible for them to have a baby—literally, physically, biologically impossible.

And yet.

This pair is about to enter a season in which God does new and surprising things, when the impossible becomes possible. Again Zechariah has big questions! But it turns out those questions are not the right ones. Because following the initial conversation with God's celestial agent, the prophet is stricken silent.

It seems that the correct response to news so wonderful, impossible, mysterious, and truly awesome is to simply shut up. And thus the priest/prophet/father-to-be is essentially sentenced to a nine-month time out. (Note to self: if a messenger of God comes bearing gifts, you say thank you and then hush!)

It's probably for the best that Zechariah came down with long-term laryngitis. Otherwise, he might have run right home to blurt out the same sort of things to his *wife* that he just said to the angel! Can you imagine? Just picture Zechariah going home and saying to Elizabeth: *Come on now, I believe in the Lord's mighty powers and all, but you are no spring chicken!* Certainly the angel took the priest's voice away to teach him a lesson about his unbelief; but it may have also kept the priest out of trouble with his spouse in a more immediate and practical sense!

Talking too much, as most of us well know, can lead to all sorts of trouble. It can also distract us from the significance of the moment at hand.

As is often the case, it is important to take a step back from the text and acknowledge some

problematic themes. Particularly the belief of the ancients (and not-so-ancients) that fertility was closely tied to God's favor. Much like the prosperity gospel of some modern-day evangelicals, this belief has a damaging flip side. If one believes that fertility is a sign of God's approval, then the clear implication is that *infertility* must surely be a sign of God's *displeasure*—and a sure indicator of a woman's (always the woman's) unfaithfulness. Sadly, that harmful message has been conveyed across the generations in overt and covert ways, and it still sneaks into our contemporary church settings if we aren't intentional about untying that particular knot of bad theology.

Science and, to some extent, theology have evolved enough for us to know that pregnancy and childbirth are natural processes, subject to all the complications of life itself. Life, in all its forms, is certainly a gift from God. But that doesn't mean that a couple's struggle with infertility reflects God's judgment on their life. Such a shallow view of divine activity in the world negates the very premise of a compassionate and life-giving God. Furthermore, it presents a logical fallacy. Do we really believe that only "good" and deserving people become parents? Only those who will love and nurture their children and protect them from harm? We wish that would be true, but a quick glance at the headlines on any given day will sadly prove otherwise.

Such harmful theology, filled with judgment and shame, has its source not in the voice of God or angels but in the voice of humans. Namely, humans talking too much.

This story offers, among other things, a sacred invitation to hold some complicated and opposing truths together. Think of holding them in opposite hands so that you can weigh them thoughtfully, carefully, and then choose which one to keep.

On the one hand, it is true that many of our biblical stories have elements that don't hold up today, given what we know about science and the natural world, and that these stories have also been interpreted in ways that do harm, particularly to women. At the same time, in that other hand, there are also magnificent truths about God's life-giving love at work in this story! Namely, that the divine word actively steps into the world to deliver amazing news. God's activity among humans will continue in new, surprising, and miraculous ways. In God, the impossible has been made possible; there will be life where human eyes would never expect to witness it.

If this impossible birth is to be a reality, then what other impossible things might be made manifest with God?

Taking "God's favor" in the form of pregnancy out of the mix, the story of this unlikely conception contains an element of surprise—and holy terror!—that bears significant spiritual implications and an important theme of the biblical narrative. Given the fact that this is such incredibly good news, now we have to wonder—why is Zechariah so terrified when the angel of the Lord appears to him?

## A High-Risk Venture

Beyond the shock factor of spotting an other-worldly being in the middle of your workplace,

we might assume that Zechariah also senses the terrifying certainty that his life is about to change in a big way. And isn't change the most terrifying thing of all?

Gabriel's reassuring "don't be afraid" is followed by the news of the baby, as if having a baby is not terrifying in and of itself! Talk about facing the unknown and unknowable. Nothing will rock your ordinary world like bringing a child into it. And certainly the age factor for Zechariah and Elizabeth further complicates matters. This is a high-risk pregnancy in every possible way.

Not only is there a baby coming (surprise!) to a couple that thought that season of life was long gone (surprise again!), but this is not just any baby that's on the way. This child will be known as John the Baptizer. That name could mean bad news for his middle school years, but he'll survive that particular hazard. Still, this baby is not showing up for an ordinary life.

John the Baptizer is coming to prepare the way for another.

The son who is coming to this unlikely family will be a trailblazer. He will be a wilderness wanderer. He will speak truth to power and call out the sins of the powerful. He is going to bring a hopeful word of justice and equality that will not be met kindly by those in charge. It's the dangerous work of making a way where there is no way—in short, the work of ushering in the kingdom of heaven and making a place in the world for his cousin, Jesus.

To recap: Zechariah encounters a heavenly being in the midst of his ordinary tasks. Terrifying!

He receives impossible news, which he is simultaneously afraid to believe (it's too good to be true!) and is also afraid *might* be true (we are too old for this, Lord). He's not only going to be a father; he is going to father the resistance. He'll join the ranks of parents everywhere whose children are peace-makers and justice seekers, first responders and teachers, humanitarian aid workers and career truth tellers: in other words, this man will never sleep again.

What does he have to fear? *Literally everything.*

But what does the angel say? Do not be afraid.

Not "it will probably be okay." No platitudes or empty promises. Just a simple, impossible commandment: do not fear.

The word *angel* means, simply, "messenger." In ancient Hebrew Scriptures, an angel becomes totally transparent when speaking to a human, and they become the voice of God, with no identity or personality outside of that. For instance, the angel in the book of Genesis that appears to Hagar and tells her she will bear a son named Ishmael has no name. Same goes for the exodus story, when God promises that an angel will go ahead of the people and make a way for them. Consider them "Angel Number Five" in the credits, because they get no proper nouns. It is only in later texts, like the book of Daniel, when angels are given names of their own. In Daniel, Gabriel first appears, "having the appearance of a man."<sup>2</sup> Gabriel is perhaps the archetypal angel, and he appears in several other religious texts (including the Quran), but for all that familiarity, he is not so much a character in this divine drama as he is the semi-embodied voice of the Holy.

In such capacity, notice that this messenger of God does not try to overexplain the details of all that is to come. Instead, he casts a vision for the world and the gifts this child will bring to it. He doesn't say there will not be hard parts, painful moments, or long, sleepless nights. He just speaks a simple assurance that none of it is to be feared, because God will abide with loving faithfulness in every moment of it. God is there, even now, in the voice of the angel. These are not empty words of comfort so much as they are facts!

What if we were to hear that same sacred word spoken over our own lives, our own deepest fears, our darkest sleepless nights? Maybe we could name what it is we fear in the silence—and find our fear transformed by the certain presence of God.

Several years ago, I was sitting outside a cabin in Estes Park, where my husband and I were celebrating our fifteenth anniversary. It was dark out, and we were enjoying a fire in the fire pit on a very chilly evening. I was just thinking how lovely and peaceful the whole situation was when the world's most enormous grizzly bear came wandering through our driveway. It was so close that we could hear its heavy footsteps before we saw its silhouette in the motion spotlight from the cabin next door.

It was terrifying in its proximity. But because it was moving so slowly (I now truly know what the word *lumbering* means), my instinct was to be still and let it just pass by. I took some slow, deep breaths, trying not to make a sound, as I watched its breath hovering in the light in the cold night air. Even when it

came so close I could literally smell that wild cologne that accompanies truly massive and untamed beasts, I just sat still until it passed by in peace.

We were done with the fire pit after that. If I recall, we skipped it (and the adjacent hot tub) for the rest of the trip!

I've often since wondered, though: How many more perceived dangers in our lives would just pass on by if we would only keep still?

Maybe if we sit in a quiet place, like Zechariah, we will find that courage for facing the unknown and seemingly terrifying is born in contemplation and stillness. Can we stay out of the noise before the rush of the season carries us away and think about who it is that we wait for? If we can do that with intention, we might find that much of what we fear simply dissolves in the resounding silence.

## Discuss and Reflect

*Find a Spotify playlist and chapter introduction videos to use during group study or private meditation at:*

*[www.wjkbooks.com/CallingAllAngels](http://www.wjkbooks.com/CallingAllAngels)*

- Think of a time when you had to endure an uncomfortable silence. Why was it uncomfortable, and what did you learn??
- Think of a time when you experienced silence that was needed, restorative, or healing. How did you find that silence, and is it something you seek out regularly?



- Name out loud one thing that you are afraid of. What is it like to articulate that fear and share it with others?
- Traditionally, the first week of Advent is about hope. What is one thing you hope for yourself or for the world in this season? And what would it look like to act on that hope rather than act out of fear?
- Set an intention to embrace silence and stillness this week. Where will you find or how will you create that space? How might it change you?

### Activity Idea for This Week

With your family, church group, or any group of friends and neighbors, go for a hike in a nearby park or nature preserve. If weather doesn't permit or if members of your group have physical limitations, watch a nature show together (maybe an episode of *Our Universe*, narrated by Morgan Freeman, or the Ken Burns documentary *National Parks: America's Best Idea*). Reflect on the role of nature in our lives, and how our relationship with the natural world has changed with the evolution of technology. Set some intentions together about reconnecting with natural spaces in your community, and talk about what the benefits will be for your health and your faith journey.

# DAILY REFLECTIONS

## Week 1, Day 1

As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”

Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

—Exodus 14:10–14, NIV

Fear is a natural human response to danger. Many years of evolution serve us well when we are in a tight situation. Fight or flight instinct kicks in, and the resulting adrenaline can save our lives.

But so often, our body kicks off that fear response for something that is not life threatening at all. Biologically speaking, we sometimes fail to distinguish an angry email or a stressful workday from, say, getting chased by a bear. The pace of our lives and the state of the world leave our nerve endings fragile and frayed. That fight-or-flight situation can be triggered by the simplest things.

In such a state, it is hard to find peace within ourselves, much less peace for the world.

This passage finds the Israelites standing at a crossroads. They are at the brink of either total annihilation or complete freedom. And while they don't get an angelic visitation in this moment, they do get a word from God, by way of Moses: "Do not be afraid."

This is not just a holy, abstract "fear not." More to the point, Moses says, "The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still" (v. 14, NIV).

When was the last time you faced down fear or anxiety by being still?

Remember how God protected the people of Israel as they escaped Pharaoh, and how God continues to promise protection and safety now. The next time you feel the adrenaline rush that comes from anger, stress, or uncertainty, pause and take a breath. Hear the voice that speaks peace over the waters, that assures the troubled, and that casts out all fear: "The LORD will fight for you; . . . be still."

*God of the desert places, we trust that you have not abandoned us to our fears. Give us wisdom to trust our instincts and discernment to know real danger from our own anxious spirit. Speak peace to our racing hearts and busy minds. Teach us to be still, trusting in your abiding presence and love. Amen.*