

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was right almost 90 years ago and he's still spot on today.

We have nothing to fear but fear itself.

But, oh my, how fearfully frightening fear can be. So hard, sometimes, to shake ourselves free from its 360-degree grip.

FDR used his immortal words to give hope to a nation swallowed by The Great Depression but they strike a resounding chord of truth in the world today.

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," Jesus says, offering us his own "New Deal."

A "New Deal" of living a life free from fear. That doesn't mean a life free of things that can make us afraid. The world will never be free of such things. But we don't have to let them swallow us like The Great Depression swallowed our nation until FDR's New Deal began to lift the economy.

Jesus knows how debilitating fear can be. That is why the Gospels are full of him telling us not to be afraid.

Fear is a primal emotion in human beings. Fear grabs us by the throat, by the heart, and, Jesus knows, it can grab us by the soul, too.

Fear is like that "dark matter" in space. Fear, in fact, is exactly like a "black hole" in space. Their dense gravity grabs anything within reach and inexorably pulls it into the black hole.

Even light cannot escape. Even light cannot free itself from a black hole, once it has been swallowed.

Life throws "dense gravity" at us. Hard times, difficult challenges that make us afraid for ourselves or our loved ones.

And we all know what fear can then do to us.

Fear robs our favorite song of its melody.

Fear steals laughter from our favorite comedies.

When we are afraid, we can read our favorite book by our favorite author without feeling anything like our usual joy.

Fear erases the colors from our favorite paintings.

Our favorite food or meal tastes dull when we are afraid.

Fear diminishes everything.

Jesus knows.

Jesus understands.

"Do not be afraid, little flock," Jesus tells us, hoping we will listen and feel our Good Shepherd's arms around us as he lifts us out of the thorny grasp of fear.

Fear is the valley of the shadow of death through which, at various times of our lives, we must travel.

But never alone.

Psalm 23 tells the truth and reading it is one of the quickest ways to fall into our Good Shepherd's arms when we are afraid because fear is the wolf Jesus will stop in its tracks.

"I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me."

Or, let us say, "I will fear no fear, for you are with me... You prepare a table before me in the presence of my fears. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

A house in which there is nothing to fear.

Not even fear, itself.