

KING OF KINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH



Isaiah 35:4-7

No Fear

I don't have much of a pattern for picking text for the sermon. I almost always pick one of the three readings that are assigned for the day. (These readings come from a three-year series that walks us through the Gospels, New Testament Epistles, and an Old Testament reading. I find it useful because I cannot decide to preach on my favorite subject, but find a variety of topics through the year.) Of the three lessons for a Sunday, I prefer the Gospel lesson. Sometimes I pick one of the other lessons because I haven't preached on it before or because I've preached on one of the lessons for two or three cycles in a row.

But sometimes I pick a text because it just grabs my attention. Sometimes there is a word or phrase that I cannot help but think applies to the whole congregation.

"Say to those with fearful hearts" grabbed my attention this week. I think that lurking in our hearts, unspoken but real, there is fear. I'm not thinking about spiders or heights.

For some it is a fear of something in the past. Maybe a lingering guilty feeling that God will eventually "get you" for what you did.

Others are afraid of the situations in the present. You don't want to disappoint your parents. You may be frightened by the moral decay you see in our country or by the potential for violence — on our own streets or in the world. Maybe it is the news that is coming soon from the doctor or the boss. Maybe it is a fear from the fact that you need to have a tough conversation with someone and you get sick to your stomach thinking about what you have to say or what might be said to you.

And who doesn't have fears about the future? The stock market doesn't give us reason to be hopeful about retirement packages or savings plans. A family history of heart disease or cancer

can fill us with fear about what lies in our future. Or some are afraid of what the future holds for loved ones. Will your children succeed and make the right choices? Or what if everything changed in a moment from an accident or job loss?

Of course, there is always the fear of death. It lurks in the future of every one of us. It is horribly consistent. Those left behind are left with the painful emptiness. But because it is unknown, there is a part of us that is afraid of what it will be like.

When God says through the prophet Isaiah, **"Say to those with fearful hearts"** I don't think there is anyone who gets to tune out what comes next. There are reasons to be afraid! The text really speaks of ***those who want to run away***. You know the feeling. You just wish you could make something go away or avoid a future situation that is probably unavoidable.

So what does God say to people who want to run away in fear and hide? **"Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you."** Too many people think of God as distant and disconnected from the events in life. But here he promises that he will come! He will come to save us.

He's doing that right now! Our worship service is designed, not to talk and sing about the abstract concept of God, but to encounter him in a meaningful way. He has promised to come in Word and Sacrament to touch the hearts of his people. He's never promised to appear as a glowing light in our midst who speaks directly to us. He's never promised to be a warm feeling in your heart. But he has promised that in the Word and the Sacraments, he will be with us!

Do you remember Peter walking out on the water with Jesus? When he saw the waves, he was quickly distracted and turned his focus from

Jesus. Our God knows that happens to us all the time. The troubles and fears of life seem like giant waves crashing around us.

Your God will come is not just a prophecy to us. It is a fulfilled promise in Jesus Christ. Our God came and lived with us. In our Gospel lesson we heard him healing a deaf man whose life must have been terrifying. Our text promised that Jesus would heal the blind and the deaf and the lame. But that promise was about much more than physical healing. As Isaiah often does, this passage pictures a spiritual truth in physical terms. Jesus came to release us from sin and the grip of this wicked world. He came to lift our eyes off our troubles and gives us a clear picture of God's love. By his death on the cross, Jesus destroyed death and sin.

Through faith in Christ our enemies are crushed and we are lifted into the very presence of God. Paul writes in Colossians ***"For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God"*** (3:3). Your God has come to save you!

The reason we are afraid often is not the *what* we are afraid of, but the *why* we are afraid. Your Savior has come. He continues to come into your heart through the Word and Sacraments. His promises are of perfect love! He is the giver of ***"every good and perfect gift"*** whose love for you ***"does not change like shifting shadows."*** He is acting for your good in everything. With Jesus as our Savior, there is no reason *why* we should be afraid.

The Christian author C. S. Lewis wrote this: ***"God designed the human machine to run on himself. He himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were***

designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing." Overcoming fear means recognizing that our God has come. In Jesus, we are freed from slavery to this world and made into heirs of the next world. We are free from sin. Now, in Christ, we follow him, even if that means taking up a cross.

Fearful hearts will find momentary relief in *"hang in there, it will get better."* The anxiety of life can be ignored for a time as we distract ourselves. We can even fool each other and pretend that everything is fine.

But real relief comes to hearts that trust in Jesus Christ. He has come to be your Savior! Your enemies will lose. This relief is only seen by faith as we cling to the Word of God and bask in the power of the sacraments (which again requires faith).

You have nothing to fear. The Lord Jesus is on your side. He will watch over your moments and days. He will guide you through the chaos of this world to the perfect glory of heaven. You will win and nothing and no one can stop that!

The Lord God, the true and only God who made this world and still rules it as the King of kings says to you, ***"Be strong, do not fear."*** Amen.

Pentecost 16
September 13, 2015

