

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
September 9, 2018  
Isaiah 35:4-7a  
"Fear Not"

We confess in the explanation of the First Article: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures," but we also experience creation as a threat. This world can be a terrifying place. Martin Luther recognized that "Sinners will become frightened by the sound of a falling leaf and will take to flight as though from a sword. When the conscience is truly and thoroughly frightened, man is so overcome that he cannot act but is unable even to do any thinking. They say that such a thing happens in battle when soldiers are who are overcome by fear cannot move a hand but permit themselves to be slain by the enemy. Such a terrible punishment follows sin that at the rustling of a leaf conscience is full of fear, nay, that it cannot even bear that most beautiful creature, the very light of day, which is by nature so refreshing to us" (AE 1:170-171).

It is into this kind of world that God Himself comes in the person of His Son in order to save us and in so doing to restore us to life with Him in His remade and renewed creation. Fear not for God comes to save His fallen creation.

Life in this world is characterized by anxiety. Uncertainties surround us. Who here can guarantee that they will be back next Sunday, or even tomorrow, or even in an hour from now? You see disease stalks healthy bodies. Our faculties of hearing, seeing, and walking can and frequently are lost due to accident, illness, or just the ravages of age. Neither our health nor our wealth can be guaranteed. Our Lord speaks of these last days as times of great stress perplexity, and anxiety. Jesus said, "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world" (Luke 21:25-26). Far from evolving toward a state of harmony and perfection, the earth and the life it sustains is careening toward dissolution.

In this world of enduring anxiety it seems like evil is triumphing over righteousness. The righteous continue to suffer while the wicked only seem to prosper. Those who speak God's Word into this world will find few friends. Case in point...Jack Phillips, the baker and owner of Masterpiece Cakeshop refused to bake a cake for a homosexual couple's wedding reception citing his biblical view of marriage. They sued him and he took the case all the way to the Supreme Court. He won his case. But now the state of Colorado's Civil Rights Commission is again charging him with discrimination because he also has refused to bake a cake to celebrate a person's transgenderism.

It seems as if evil triumphs over and over again. In fact, I just learned last week that the state of Montana is targeting churches over property that the state tax assessor deems is not being used in direct service of the ministry of the congregation in an attempt to force churches to pay property tax.

And of course as we stand at the open grave of our loved ones death screams that evil triumphs.

It is into this world that God Himself comes in order to save His people. It is to anxious hearts that His Word comes to set us at peace: "Be strong, fear not" (Isaiah 35:4). Whenever God says, "Fear not" pay attention for this is not an empty platitude. We say that God's Word is efficacious, that is, that it does what it says. In other words, when God says, "Fear not," that very Word casts out our fears.

We see it at work in both the Old and New Testaments. He says to Israel, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1b). By means of His angelic messenger He proclaims to astonished shepherds outside of Bethlehem, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people..." (Luke 2:10). To disciples terrified by a great storm, He says, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid" (Mark 6:50). And to confused and bewildered women at the mouth of the bodiless tomb, the risen Jesus says: "Do not be afraid" (Matthew 28:10). In each case, God speaks the Word that removes fear at the same time that He is acting for the rescue of His people.

So when He says in our text today, "Be strong. Fear not" we know that He is about to do something remarkable. When God came in the flesh to save you He came to remedy your fear. With His Word God tenderly reminds you that He is not against you, but for you, in every way. This is what He says to you in His Word: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:1, 31-39).

If God were angry with you or your enemy, would He have clothed Himself with your flesh and blood and suffer and die on the cross in order to save you? Of course not! His vengeance, His judgments on your enemies including sin, death, and the devil, was executed in the person of Jesus Christ. He bore your sins in His body to the cross and has answered for them with His own blood. Now risen from the dead, He speaks to you His Word of judgment. It is the absolution of your sin. "You are forgiven."

No God is not angry with you. Rather He has done everything to reconcile you to Himself through His own Son becoming a man and our brother.

This reconciling work of our brother Jesus is not a rescue from creation but rather a restoration of creation. That restoration of creation includes you too. God didn't become a man in order to take man out of creation. God created us in body and soul to live within a perfect creation. Remember how Luther confesses all that God has given to us in creation. All the creaturely gifts that we receive are given simply out of His fatherly, divine goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness in us. That is to say that these gifts are on account of Christ and through Him.

Sin introduced disorder, disease, and death into creation. By the blood of His cross, Jesus has reconciled all things in heaven and on earth to Himself. Jesus has done His work of redemption in creation, purchasing and winning salvation for us in His very own body and blood. In our text for today, the signs of redemption are physical, bodily: the eyes of the blind are opened, the ears of the deaf are unstopped, the lame leap like the deer, the mute sing for joy. Through the atoning work of Jesus we see all of these gifts being bestowed and the disorder, disease, and death that had been introduced into creation beginning to be taken away.

Moreover don't miss or underestimate the end of our text which connects the coming of God to save His people with the restoration of creation. There waters break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sands of the desert are turned into pools and the thirsty ground becomes springs of water. Creation is restored. Creation is again made perfect.

Our response to this incredible promise of our future which has been secured in the death and resurrection of our brother Jesus is doxology. We can only hear these words and respond with thanks and praise, serving and obeying Him.

A Lutheran theologian of the last century, Werner Elert, said, "Some live in the light of the Last Day, others live in its shadow" (Elert, Last Things. Concordia: St Louis, MO. 1974. 28). My fellow redeemed, we live in the light of the Last Day, for our Savior who has come into this distressed and dying world is our brother who will come again bringing with Him the new heavens and new earth, the home of righteousness. In the meantime, we wait not with fear and trembling at all that is untrustworthy and uncertain in this crumbling creation, not shaking at every rustling autumn leaf, but we wait as those who have already been redeemed in both body and soul by Jesus Christ the crucified and resurrected one. He says to you once again, "Be strong. Fear not! Behold your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come in order to save you." That is a promise made by God to you. He is faithful. He will do it. He has already begun by announcing to you His efficacious Word, a Word which does what it says: "You are forgiven for all of your sin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen"