

September 6, 2015
Isaiah 35:4-7a

Proper 18a
Be Strong Fear Not

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This weekend we hopefully take some time to rest before the Summer Season Unofficially comes to a close tomorrow. As we take time to rest, hopefully we spend some time reflection on the summer that is now behind us. As I reflect I look at the last three weeks and the vast amount of knowledge we've garnered about the Triune God and who He is and what He does. Three weeks ago we confessed in the explanation of the First Article of the Creed: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures," but we also experience creation as a threat. You and I know this world can be a fearful place. Just turn on the news, click on the news on the internet or open the newspaper. Martin Luther says that even after the fall into sin, Adam and Eve would have been terrified by something as harmless as a leaf rustling in the breeze. Yet it is in this world that God comes to you in the person of His Son to save us, and, in doing so, to restore us to life with Him in His creation.

Fear not, for **God comes to Save His Fallen Creation.**

As we look around the world, around our nation, around state, community, church, and family anxious hearts abound.

It seems that life in this world is marked by anxiety, even perhaps the medical and psychological issues that come from diagnoses anxiety. For our sin has subjected creation to futility.

There are uncertainties to life itself. Disease stalks healthy bodies. Hearing, eyesight, and mobility can and are lost to accident, disease, or old age. Living and learning about the farming community, uncertainties are all around with how much rain, how hot, how cold, how dry it can be will affect crop and even the cash flow from the crop. Neither health nor wealth can be guaranteed.

The Lord speaks of these last days as a time of stress, perplexity, and anxiety. Hear from the Gospel of Luke the Lord's Words: ²⁵ "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, ²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken."¹ Far from evolving toward a state of harmony and perfection, the earth and the life it sustains careens toward dissolution, both ecologically and ethically.

It seems that evil apparently triumphs. The righteous suffer while the wicked seem to suffer. This past spring and summer you've heard of Christian people who oppose same

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Lk 21:25–26). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

sex marriage lose their jobs, homes, and livelihoods because they stand up for the truth. County clerks are resigning because they will not give same sex couples a marriage license. You hear of the American pastor who is still in prison in Iran and our government does nothing about it, but yet the Muslim extremists get away with all sorts of things. You hear of celebrities like Bruce Jenner are being praised for what they do and perhaps are worshipped, and those that speak openly against are chastised.

Injustice prevails on national and international levels. You hear of two white reporters or even several military personnel being shot and killed and it remains fairly quiet in the news a day or so after the event, where other crimes or unfortunate events are blown out of proportion for weeks, months or even years. Over the last few months you've heard of and perhaps have seen the undercover videos of Planned Parenthood selling the body parts of aborted babies, even of babies that are born alive with a beating heart. You have people that care more about one Lion being killed in Zimbabwe then millions of babies being killed every year in mass genocide.

We could go on and on and see that evil appears to triumph. To end of it all, the end of every human biography is finally death...which is sin's ultimate payoff.

Into this world God comes to save. His bold words set troubled hearts at peace: "Be strong, fear not!" When God says "fear not," pay attention, for this is far different from any empty platitude. It is more than a command; it is a word that itself casts out our fears, for God is Himself acting.

In both the Old and New Testaments, God announces His salvific actions with a word that bids anxious hearts, "fear not." He says to His people Israel, "*Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.*" Through the angel Gabriel, God proclaims His mercy to a young virgin: *Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.* Through the angel, he proclaims to Bethlehem's shepherds, "*Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.*" To the terrified disciples in the midst of stormy sea, he says, "*Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.*" The Risen Lord speaks to those confused women on Easter morning: "*Do not be afraid.*"

This is the message that I am authorized to announce to you this morning: "Be Strong, Fear not."

The remedy for your fear is this: God's coming in the flesh to save. With these words of "Be Strong, Fear Not," God would tenderly remind you that He is not against you, but for you in every way.

If God were your enemy, would He clothe Himself in your flesh and your blood and suffer and die on the cross to save you? Would He allow Himself to suffer sin's ultimate payoff even though He was without sin? Of Course NOT!

His vengeance, His Judgement on your enemies (sin, death, and the devil), was executed in Christ, who bore your sins in His body to the cross and has answered for

them with His own blood. Raised from the dead, He speaks to you the word of another judgement. It is the absolution you have already heard this morning and you hear again: “Your sins are forgiven.”

Jesus Christ is your Brother. He comes to do what the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament promised. HE comes as the One who fulfills the “messianic manifesto” of Isaiah 61 which says: *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;*² *to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;*³ *to grant to those who mourn in Zion— to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.*² This good news for you and for all creation is echoed in our text from Isaiah 35.

The reconciling work of our Brother is not a rescue *from* creation but a restoration **OF creation**...that includes you.

God does not extract us from creation. God created us in body and soul to live within creation. Recall again how Luther confesses all that God has given us in creation in His explanation of the First Article. All the creaturely gifts you receive are out of God’s fatherly, divine, goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness in you. That is to say that these gifts are on account of Christ and through Him.

Sin brought disorder, disease, and death into creation. By the blood of His cross, He has reconciled all things in heaven and on earth to Himself as St. Paul says to the Church in Colossae: *¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*³

Christ has redeemed us in creation, purchasing and winning us in body and soul for himself. In our text, the signs of redemption are bodily, the eyes of the blind are opened, the ears of the deaf hear, the lame walk, the mute sing. You even heard a small portion of the complete redemption in our Gospel reading from Mark. Even in the Large Catechism, Luther reminds us that, “where the soul is healed, the body is helped as well.”

Through the all atone work of Jesus Christ, we receive **ALL** good things from our Father, including all the gifts of the body, such as sight, hearing, mobility, and speech. Recall the blessing uttered by your pastor in the dismissal at the communion rail: “Now

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Is 61:1–3). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Col 1:18–20). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

may this, the true body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in both **body and soul** to life everlasting. Go in peace and joy, your sins are forgiven.”

Our response can only be one of high doxology as one sings in a great and beautiful hymn: “O Spirit, who didst once restore Thy Church that it might be again Thy bringer of Good News to Men, Breathe on Thy cloven Church once more, That in these gray and latter days There may be those whose life is praise, Each life a high doxology To Father, Son, and unto Thee.” And lived out as we confess in the catechism: “For all this it is my duty to thank, praise, serve, and body him.”

A great Lutheran theology of the last century, Werner Elert, said these words, “Some live in the light of the Last Day, others live in its shadow”. Dear redeemed Children of God, you live in the light of the Last Day, for the Savior who has come into this distressed and dying world, in these gray and latter days, is your Brother. He will come again and with him bring new heavens and a new earth, the home of righteousness. In the meantime, we wait not with trembling at all that is untrustworthy and uncertain in this crumbling universe, shaking at the sound of every rustling leaf in the autumn wind, but as those redeemed in body and soul by Christ the Crucified. 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 to save you.” That is a promise you can trust, for God is faithful, and He will do it.

In Jesus Name. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.