

Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost – September 9, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Isaiah 35:4-7 (NIV)

Say to those with fearful hearts, "**Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.**" (5) Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. (6) Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. (7) The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

Dear Friends in Christ,

What is it that makes you afraid? Are you afraid of thunder and lightning? Are you afraid of the dark? Are you afraid of flying? What fears and frustrations do you have in your personal lives? What is it that fills you with uncertainty? We might easily have as many answers to those questions as we have people worshipping with us today. In response to your personal fears, frustrations and concerns the Words of our text offer you hope and encouragement.

Theme: Be Strong, Do Not Fear!

1. Your God has come.
2. He has done great things.

Be strong, do not fear...those words are meaningless and empty if we are to find our strength from within our selves. As these words are spoken by our God, they take on true meaning. The Lord is inviting to trust in his promises not commanding us to do fend for ourselves. Our God recognizes that there will be times in our lives when we will become weak, fearful, timid, impatient, hasty, or inconsiderate. Help, comfort, and encouragement are desperately needed so we don't fall victim to the assaults of Satan. The Lord does not disappoint us. He comes with his word of encouragement: Be strong, do not fear, I am here.

Aren't those the words a young child longs to hear when they wake up crying and afraid because of a loud clap of thunder or a bad dream? It's ok, don't be afraid – mommy's here! I'll take care of you. Be a big boy! The mother's calm assurance and strength enable the child to set aside his fears and to "be a big boy."

That's what God says to us in this text – you don't have to be afraid. You can be strong because I'm with you to support you and protect you. At just the right time and in just the right way God promised Israel of old that he would come to them and intervene on their behalf. This promised coming of the Lord would accomplish several purposes.

First of all God is promising that he will avenge all the wrongs that have been done to his people. God is a just God and he will see that justice is done. That takes a load off our minds – there is no need for us to waste our time and energy plotting and conniving against those who persecute us for our faith. The apostle Paul explains in (2 Thessalonians 1:6-7 NIV) **God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you (7) and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well.**

Vengeance is mine I will repay says the Lord. (cf. Romans 12:19 KJV) Isaiah comforted the people with this promise of the Lord's coming to bring vengeance upon those who rebelled against him and persecuted his people. **Your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.**

God does not wish to terrify and threaten. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. **As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways!** (Ezekiel 33:11 NIV) The Lord is more interested in bringing forgiveness, hope, and life to his fallen creatures than death. The ultimate purpose of God's coming would be salvation for his people. When God would come to the aid of his people, he will defeat all of their enemies (and his enemies) and provide a wonderful victory for them. Our greatest enemies are the devil and his allies. He is the one who bring fear into our lives and seeks to separate us from God and his blessings.

Today the Lord reminds us through his word that we do not have to fear and that we can be strong because he has come. God came as a child in Bethlehem – he defeated Satan for us. He defeated death for us. He set us free from the curse of sin. He has brought us into God's family and promises to shield us and protect us from all harm and danger. Those promises allow us to bold in the face of any situation that confronts us in life. Those promises assure us of eternal life in the glories of heaven. Our God has come and he will come again to take us to be with himself.

God's people hear the Gospel message and it makes them strong. It drives away their fears. Through Christ, sins that deserve punishment from God are forgiven. Through Christ, death becomes a sleep from which he himself will waken us. Through Christ, every trial becomes a source of joy because God will work it out for our own God. We can do all things through him who gives us strength.

Believers down through the ages have been encouraged to wait for the Lord and to trust in him. Fear not! Your God has come. This sweet Gospel steadies our weak hands and hearts and strengthens us to move forward when we have no strength of our own.

Indeed our God has come and he has done great things. Isaiah foresaw the wonderful things God would do for his people as he wrote in our text: **Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. (6) Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.**

How different things are for God's people – the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will not just walk but will leap for joy and tongues that were unable to speak a sound will gush with shouts of joy. There can only be one who make such changes -- and that is God himself.

When the disciples of John of the Baptist came and inquired of Jesus whether or not he was the one promised of old who would rescue God's people, Jesus told them – **“Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.** (Luke 7:22 NIV)

The first coming of the Lord wasn't going to be a time when all handicaps would disappear and all diseases would be cured. There were plenty of people who were blind, lame, deaf or had leprosy who were not healed by Jesus when he came into our world. None-the-less these miracles were signs showing that the Lord had come to provide salvation for the souls of his people. The Lord's first coming assures us that he will come again to free us from all the consequences of sin – including death and disease. God promises that on that day **he will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.** (Revelation 21:4 NIV)

The prophet continues, **Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. (7) The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.**

The picture here is the wonderful changes that the coming of the Lord would bring – yes he would bring physical relief for some but more importantly he would bring spiritual relief for all. The Lord has done wonderful things for us. He has provided us with a spiritual transformation. We were born in sin – deserving of eternal death. In that sense, our hearts were like a barren, drought-damaged wilderness. However now, springs of living water flow from our hearts. The change of heart in every believer is a miracle of God. Where there was once death because of sin, life springs up by faith in the Savior – cool refreshing life, sustained by the Holy Spirit through the life-giving, refreshing Gospel message.

Those afflicted with Spiritual afflictions have a great need for help and the Lord came to provide salvation for them – now through the wonderful working of the Holy Spirit, we can respond with enthusiasm, energy and joy to the salvation of our God. He has done great things for us – therefore we can be strong and we will not fear.

What is it that makes you afraid? Are you afraid of thunder and lightning? Are you afraid of the dark? Are you afraid of flying? What fears and frustrations do you have in your personal lives? What is it that fills you with uncertainty? No matter what our fears might be our text has reminded us that we can set them aside because our God has come and has done great things for us.

Even the shock and awe of the final day of judgment, need not alarm those who are safe in the care of their Savior God...Indeed the Lord warned that in the last days there will be terrible things happening in the world. **"On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. (26) People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. (27) At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. (28) When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."** (Luke 21:25-28 NIV)

We can be strong in the face of whatever fills us with fear or terror. We do not have to fear for our God has come and he has done mighty things. Because he has already come, we eagerly await his final coming with joyous anticipation. Amen.