

Pentecost 16 – September 9, 2018
Text: Isaiah 35:4-7a
Theme: Fear Not! That's an Order!

We just sang the following:

**Trust not in rulers; they are but mortal;
Earthborn they are and soon decay.
Vain are their counsels at life's last portal,
When the dark grave engulfs its prey.
Since mortals can no help afford,
Place all your trust in Christ, our Lord.
Alleluia, alleluia!**

Does it strike you as a little hypocritical if we sing that verse and then walk out those doors and start worrying about what's going to happen to our health, our job, our kids, our nation, our retirement? It does me. If we mean those words, then we've got nothing to be worried about! Since mortals can no help afford, place all your trust in Christ our Lord!

God knows that this is a problem for us. That's why over and over again in the Bible you hear the words, fear not. This is not a fond wish or a pleasantry offered by God. He does not speak the way we do when we ask that person, "How are you doing?" and then walk past them quickly before they can answer because we are terrified that they might tell us how they are doing and we might have to respond to their pain. God means everything he says. And he says FEAR NOT! That's an order. If you are afraid of life, STOP IT! If you are afraid of him, well, that's not a bad thing

because he undoes you. He pulls the rug out from under you, especially if you are depending on mortals. God is completely other than you and you cannot understand or control him. You simple stand there and he washes over you killing you with his Word of law and then raising you to life again with the pure gospel.

He tells us to Fear Not, right from the beginning because when we caused sin to be brought into the world, we made the world a scary place. We were not happy with our place in the world so we did what we continue to do. We tried to be God. Satan told us that the fruit would make us like God and we liked that idea. We still like that idea. We are like teenagers who think they can take care of themselves and don't need interfering parents anymore. We are like preschoolers pushing their parents aside and yelling, I can do it myself! But we, with human limitations, don't know what really is scary and what just seems scary. When I was a kid, and I saw a malevolent shape inching towards me across the dark bedroom, I highly suspected that the shape under the sheet was my brother but how could I be sure? It might well be the old dead woman who haunted the abandoned house at the end of the block? What if it was her?

Think about Adam and Eve right after sin entered the world. What do you think they thought the first time the leaves died and

fell off the trees? What about the first time one of them got the stomach flu and experienced that kind of joy? I would think that Adam and Eve must have been terrified most of the time!

Into such a world as that, God speaks. Fear not. Regardless of our rebellion, everything is still in his hands, and you will either live and be stronger for it, or you will die and be with him but either way, fear not. See? He's not saying fear not because daddy's going to make it all better. No. You choose to sin and the punishment for sin is death. Get over any idea that life is supposed to be happy and pleasant until you drift quietly off to a higher plane.

God speaks to his people in the book of Isaiah, from which we have our Old Testament text today. These people are being hauled off into a foreign land for exile. Be strong! Fear not! Your God will take care of everything and this will be reversed when your time is over, and it was. The people of God were returned to the Promised Land, but that was not because they were good and deserved a reward. They were returned to the Promised Land to fulfill prophesy because that's where the Christ was to be born and then about 400 years later, he was. God came to earth and took on human flesh. Fear Not! The angels said it to the shepherds the night he became incarnate. Fear Not! Jesus said it to the people.

It was the first thing he said to his disciples when he rejoined them after the resurrection. Fear not.

You and I have no fear. It is not because we are good Lutherans. It is not because we say our prayers and give appropriate offerings. We fear nothing because we have already been killed and raised from the dead and now we only await the last day when we will inherit the kingdom!

What will happen will happen in this world but never forget who controls this world. The one who controls the world, the one who makes the blind see and the deaf hear, that one says to us; Fear Not! Come to the table and take the medicine that conquers the world and all its boogie men. Receive the very body and blood of the one who has drown you in the Baptismal waters and raised you to resurrected life. He commands you to be strong and fear not. Remember, it's not a fond wish, it's an order. And remember, just as the sun, moon and stars were created, God's word calls forth whatever it commands, so fear not!