

“Do Not Be Afraid!! Hope>Fear”

First Lutheran Church-November 14, 17-18

Isaiah 36:1-3, 13-20; 37:1-7; 2:1-4

When the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah, Isaiah said to them, ‘Say to your master, “Thus says the Lord: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me. I myself will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor, and return to his own land; I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.” ’

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come

*the mountain of the Lord’s house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.*

*Many peoples shall come and say,
‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.’*

*For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

*He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.*

Let us pray...

Oh may the words from my mouth and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer!! AMEN!!

HOPE>FEAR

.....

Hope>Fear....Today's reading from Isaiah is one with a lot of complicated, unfamiliar, hard to pronounce names which is a little intimidating for lay ministers and I REALLY appreciate Pastor Scott choosing this text and asking me to preach on it!! But all silliness aside, it makes the story seem more confusing than it really is. So sit back and here we go!!

Assyria, the superpower at the time, has destroyed everything in its path leading to Judah, including major cities. They now stand at the door of Jerusalem, threatening the same fate. Assyria already conquered Israel (Northern Kingdom), leaving Judah (Southern Kingdom) vulnerable.

The Assyrian king knows how to terrorize, and with the Hebrew people he does this with a double-punch. First, through his messenger, the king sows seed of doubt about their leader Hezekiah and their God. "Don't let Hezekiah mislead you by saying, 'The Lord will save us.' Have any of the gods of the other nations saved them from Assyria? Why do you think your God will do any better?"

Which also illustrates the second point. The messenger reminds the Hebrews of all the other nations the Assyrians have laid to waste on their way to Jerusalem. Cities like Hamath and Arpad, like Lachish, which have been reduced to nothing – their inhabitants killed or taken away as captives.

What we have in these chapters of Isaiah is a classic set-up between a ruthless bully and God's faithful servant. King Sennacherib uses the power of fear to intimidate the people of Judah into surrendering to him. I can't imagine how the people of the city must have felt, hearing these threats and taunts from such a powerful enemy.

Many probably felt like Hezekiah, who responds by tearing his clothes and covering himself in sackcloth, which was a sign of mourning. This Assyrian threat must have had him at his wits end. He can't see a way out for his people and so he goes to the temple, to the prophet Isaiah for some words of wisdom. For some word of hope in this terrifying situation.

Fear is powerful. It was in Isaiah's day, and it's just as powerful today. We don't have to think about being afraid, it's just something we do. It's an instinct that every human being has, and it plays an important role in human survival. But fear has a much darker side. Fear can also be used to motivate. Fear can be used to paralyze. Fear can be used to manipulate or control. And we are no strangers to experiencing fear in these ways.

Some say that we live in a culture of fear, where there never seems to be a shortage of things to fear or dread: things like crime, deadly diseases, online predators, immigrants, environmental collapse, stock market collapse, climate change, terrorists.

At every turn, there seems to be something to be fearful of, and we're definitely not the better for it. As it turns out, many of these fears we have are not even founded in reality.

From watching the news, hearing about crime, hearing our politicians continue to cut each other down and hearing about how divided we are as a nation. Many parents, including me at times, are so fearful for their children's safety that kids today are exposed to very little risk. Which comes at a cost – it means kids are missing out on important developmental and learning experiences.

Advertisers and marketers even use fear to sell us stuff. They present a scenario they hope will invoke our sense of fear – like not having anything to serve mom when she calls unexpectedly and announces she's coming right over. Then they show us a quick and easy solution that entails using their product or service.

Reasons to be fearful are all around us. And it's no wonder that so many suffer from anxiety or depression these days.

The only thing we have to fear
is fear itself.

Franklin D. Roosevelt



www.thequotes.in

Let me take you back in time!! The year is 1933. President Roosevelt had to address a country that was in the grips of a massive economic depression (it was the dirty 30s). People were frightened, and rightly so. And it was into this situation that Roosevelt spoke these famous words of calm and hope: "...the only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Roosevelt, in that speech, could have been a stand-in for Isaiah. Because when King Hezekiah comes to Isaiah, distraught about the future of his people, Isaiah says to him, "Thus says, the Lord: Do not be afraid."

Those words of assurance is what Hezekiah needed so desperately in that moment. The promise that God will see them through this moment in spite of all the evidence to the contrary.

And King Sennacherib never does take the city of Jerusalem. The details of how this unfolds are not exactly clear but we know that Jerusalem remains safe and intact at this time.

Once again we are right on track with the story of God's relationship with the Israelites. Things won't always be easy for the Israelites; things won't even always be ok – there have been hard times (like slavery in Egypt and wandering in the wilderness for 40 years) and there will be more hard times to come (Jerusalem will be captured by the Babylonians, the temple will be destroyed, and the people will be sent into exile). Things won't always be ok, but God promises to be with them through it all.

God promises never to abandon them, and this is something to find hope in. And where hope takes root, there is little room for fear to abide.

To the Hebrews God says, “Do not be afraid. Place your hope, your trust in me.”

When we find ourselves caught up in fear, the question of “where do we find our hope” becomes essential. And as followers of Jesus, of course our hope is also found in that same God who says to us, “do not be afraid.” A command and promise that shows up again and again in the Bible, which it means it’s probably something to pay attention to.

As I’ve said, fear is an instinct, it’s something that we all experience; and it’s something we can’t stop ourselves from experiencing. But it would seem that in God’s mind, it’s not the best place to hang out. God continually calls on us to move from a place of fear to a place of hope. To trust that God will provide enough for us to be and do God’s will.

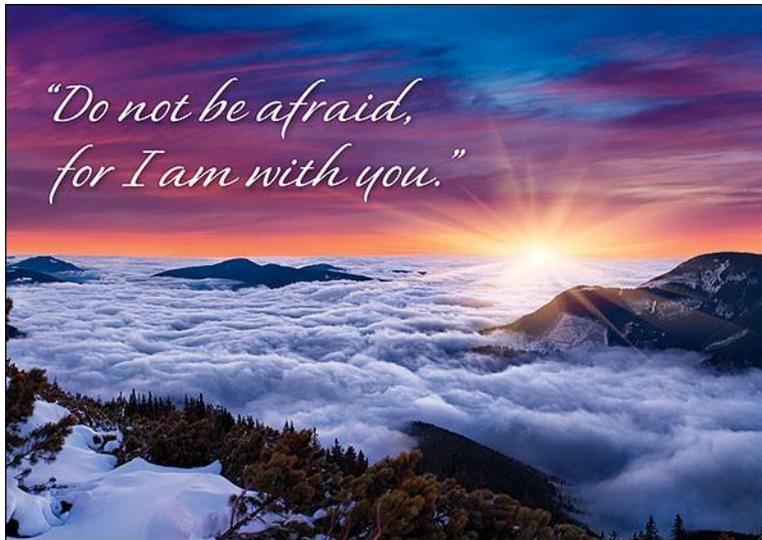
It’s a lot harder to be hopeful than it is to be afraid. Fear is a gut instinct. Hope is something we need to learn and to do together. It’s hard work but it’s very important work, because what we think about the future shapes how we act in the present. If we believe that the world is going to hell in a hand-basket we’re not going to be very motivated to stick our necks out. But if we believe that God loves and has a purpose for this world than we live in ways that embody that vision.

The church has to witness to hope in the midst of fear. The church has to witness to peace in the midst of distress and disharmony. The church has to witness to life in the midst of death. This is what God’s gift of hope charges us to do.

And we live out this hope in very concrete and simple ways. We live out this hope when we worship and pray together. We live out this hope when we work together on projects that benefit our neighbors, locally and globally.

It’s easy to get caught up in fear. Some of our fears are legitimate – although many are not. The challenge is to determine when our fears really are legitimate. To let go of those that aren’t and then to decide how to act on the real ones.

Staying grounded in God's hope for this world is hard work. But we don't do this work alone, we do it together because together it's much easier to stand in hope against fear. It all comes down to faith!!



And yes, our faith in God will be challenged—we know that! It will be difficult to maintain our deep faith in the Lord through difficulties and fears. When we lose hope, our faith struggles, so we must confess it to God. Confess your difficulties. Cry out to the Lord, “Help my unbelief!” and “Increase my faith.” Then pray to God to act in your life for his purposes, his plan, and his glory. May we all be faithful instruments in the hand of our gracious God.

May our awesome God increase our faith to give us hope in this ever changing and fearful world!! Thanks be to God who gives us this promise of hope to live by!! My friends...As God says, “Do not be afraid, I am with you!” And that is our hope and that is our good news!! And all God's people say...AMEN!!