

Text: Isaiah 35:4-7. 16th Sunday after Pentecost. **September 9, 2018.**

Do not fear. Your God will come. Amen.

What makes you anxious? And not the eager anxious, but the fearful, scared, nervous, worried kind of anxious. Anxious now that school has started? Will I fit in, make friends, get good grades? Nervous about Sunday School starting? Will I teach well? Will the kids listen? I mean this is God's Word! Anxious about the new job? Anxious about money? There's enough now, but what if I get laid off? What if the stock market turns bad and I can't retire? Will I need nursing home care? Will there be enough money for the kids to go to college? Thanks pastor, now I'm really anxious. I thought I was supposed to come to church and feel better, not worse. Let's face it. Anxiety is a big problem in our world today. A pastor I know who works with college students was asked, "What's the number one problem college students talk to you about?" Without a nanosecond of hesitation he said, "Anxiety!" Not student debt or making friends or cafeteria food. Anxiety! Where do we go with it? What can we do about it? We go to the cross where Jesus died. There, God came and put all our anxiety to rest, forever, nailed and finished once and for all. Ultimately it's not what we do about anxiety. It's about what God has already done about our anxiety. He put our anxiety on Jesus and gave us peace, rest. God has come to save you from anxiety. God will come to save you from all anxiety forever.

This part of the Bible begins with the words, "Say to those with fearful hearts." This word fearful is often translated, "Anxious." And as much as we often can't control anxiety, there's a truth we need to hear. Our anxiety is a result of our sin. If we had perfect trust in God, we would have no anxiety. Our fears stem from a lack of love for God. The Bible says, "Perfect love drives out fear. The reason we have fears is that we don't love God perfectly."

The good news is this: God says to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong! Do not fear." Do you know how often God says that in the Bible? 365! 365 times God tells us, "Do not fear." Every day, "Do not fear. Your sins are forgiven. Do not fear. I have come to save you. Do not fear. I will strengthen you. Do not fear. Cast your anxiety on me, because I care for you. Do not fear. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today a Savior has been born to you."

God comes to save you. God came in an unlikely person: a baby, born in a manger. God came in an unlikely place: Bethlehem, a little town, the hymn got it right. God came in an unlikely way: a bleeding, dying man on a cross. Hardly looked like the one who came to save us. And yet that cross did save us. That man's death did rescue us from our sins, our hell, our anxiety. We have this really cool sandwich in verse four. Do not fear. Your God will come. And then later, "He will come to save you." God will come to save you. What wonderful words. God will come to save you. What a solution to our sin. God will come to save you. What an antidote for anxiety. God will come to save you.

Do not fear those words, "He will come with vengeance, with divine retribution." This is God's assurance, "I will save you from your enemies. I will give to my enemies what they have coming: my vengeance and destruction. This vengeance and destruction do not apply to those who believe in Jesus. We have the great comfort, "God does not treat us as our sins deserve." God will come to save you, not to take vengeance on you. God will come to save you, not to bring his divine retribution to you. God will come to save you.

This spiritual salvation is pictured in physical terms. Did you catch the four pictures? Blind. Deaf. Lame.

Mute. Jesus healed these physical ailments, really, literally, physically, but for a greater purpose: to show his power over all the effects of sin, to point to himself as the one who was promised. Jesus used this very verse, quoted it to show, "I am the one God promised to send, to save you." Let's give a quick example of each. The blind. Jesus healed a man who was born blind, born blind not because of some great sin he or his parents had committed, but so that Jesus could display his power in this man's life. This man made a great confession of faith in Jesus. The deaf. We heard one example in our Gospel lesson today. With spit and one word the man was deaf no more. The lame. Refer to our second lesson. Complete healing. The man was not just walking, but jumping, without any physical therapy, without eight weeks of recovery. Notice what he did. He praised God, not the human instruments God used, Peter and John. Rather, this man praised God for his healing. The mute, again we could refer to our Gospel lesson for an example. There are others. A man named Zechariah who could not speak for nine months. Then God healed him and he also immediately praised God. Yes, Jesus was concerned about the physical ailments of these people. But more importantly, Jesus did this healing, to show he was the promised Savior. He was the one these promises spoke about.

And let's take it deeper. Each of these physical conditions is a picture of our spiritual condition, our sinful spiritual condition. Sin is more than just what we do. Sin is what we naturally are. Blind. We can't see God's truth. Deaf. We naturally refuse to listen to his Word. Mute. We can't praise God on our own. Lame. We can't walk to God or go to him.

But did you catch the total reversal God carried out when he came to save you? The eyes of the blind are opened. Our eyes of faith see Jesus dying on the cross. Our eyes of faith see God's hand lifting us out of trouble. Our eyes of faith see God making us strong in sickness, taking away our anxiety with his love, his words, "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." The ears of the deaf are unstopped. Like the ear plugs are pulled out. And we can hear God's Word, for faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of Christ. We hear God tell us, "Be still and know that I am God." Our unstopped ears get to hear, "All things work together for good, to those who love God." Our unstopped ears hear, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever lives and believes in me will never, ever, ever, ever, die. Ever." Total reversal. Complete healing. Not a hearing aid that just makes everything loud, but ears that hear perfectly. Not laser surgery that just reduces the thickness of the glasses, but eyes that see things as God sees them. The lame leap like a deer, not like someone right after knee surgery who still needs a cane for months. Picture that deer leaping. That's our complete healing of sin, our unbridled joy to know, "My sins are forgiven. My anxiety is annihilated." Our tongues are no longer muted because of sin. We get to praise God, top of our voice, even if you aren't the best singer. Not just here in God's house, but in your own house, when at your neighbor's house. I'm not suggesting you knock on your neighbor's door and when he invites you in, you start a hymn sing. But your tongue can speak God's love. Your tongue can be filled with joy. Your tongue is filled with joy. You have complete healing. Total reversal. Every way you can describe your sinful condition? Jesus fixed it. Every thing that makes you anxious? Jesus came to save you from it.

And Jesus will come again to save us completely and forever. There's one little word, then, that's easy to overlook. It's at the beginning of both verses five and six. Then, will the eyes of the blind be opened. Then, will the lame leap like a deer. Then. This points us not just to the physical healing Jesus did here on earth. It points not only to the spiritual healing Jesus has worked in you. It points ahead to the perfect and complete healing Jesus will bring in heaven. Then, Jesus will come to save you completely.

Then, Jesus will come to save you forever. Right now, even our opened eyes, are still clouded with sin. We still like to put the ear plugs back in at times and don't listen to God. Now we are at times too lazy and lame to use the legs God has healed to walk and jump and praise God in his house. Even now, we keep our tongues quiet because our hearts are anxious to talk about Jesus. But then? Then, in heaven, our eyes completely opened. Our ears totally unstopped. Our legs forever healed. Our tongues constantly shouting for joy.

There's another picture God uses. Water in the wilderness. Streams in the desert. Burning sands a pool. Thirsty ground a bubbling spring. You can ask Vicar for more information. He spent the first 18 years of his life living near Phoenix, Arizona. But these pictures are not too familiar to us. But without getting into tons of topography and desert climate, we can appreciate the total reversal of the situation, the 180 change of situation. When God comes to save, there is total transformation of the person, the heart, the mind. Even in the most unlikely place, the desert. Even to the most unlikely people, us, God has come. God has come to save you.

Allow me to make one final point about our fears, anxieties, weaknesses. They are blessings from God. Hang on. Let me explain. Our fears make us realize we can't control everything and so God uses our anxieties to lead us to trust in his control of all things. Be strong. Do not fear. Our anxieties make us despair of ourselves and are often God's tool to put our trust more completely in him. Physical weaknesses? People pray a lot more in sickness than in health. I'm not contradicting myself when I said earlier that the root of our fears and anxieties is our natural sinfulness. That's still true. But God is greater than our sin. God has forgiven our sin. God's love and mercy and grace move us to put those anxieties on him, thanking him for rescuing us from our anxieties. God has given us the antidote for our anxieties, his Word. And ultimately God rescues us from all those anxieties in heaven. When your heart is fearful of a new school year, let God's Word remind you, "God will come." When your heart is anxious because of that one sin the devil just won't let you forget, remember, "God will come to save you." Whether it's new job or not enough money or poor health or family or friends causing you anxiety, remember, "God will come to save you. God already came to save you on the cross. God comes every day to save you in his Word. God will come again to save you, forever and completely in heaven." Amen.

Cast all your anxieties on Jesus, because he cares for you. Amen.