

**St. Paul Lutheran Church
Grant Park, Illinois
The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 9, 2018
Isaiah 35:4-7a**

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." Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. 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. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs.

Amy could see it from a mile away. The little boy's head was down. His shoulders were heaving. His hands were rubbing away the tears which were falling faster and harder than rain in a hurricane. Her heart immediately went out to him because she knew the reason he was crying. Amy was at the zoo and this little boy was lost and he was incredibly scared. She sprang into action. She got down on her knees, started talking to the little boy and calmed his screams and started to dry his tears.

Have you ever found yourself at a spot in life where you feel forgotten and all alone that you wish you had someone like Amy to come to your rescue? Someone who would kneel down beside you while you're crying, put their arms around you and reassure you everything is going to be alright even though your life feels like it is falling apart all around you? Ladies, I know you have. Guys, don't be too proud. You have too.

The people in our Old Testament lesson needed someone like Amy to come and reassure them. It was a time of upheaval and turmoil in Israel's history. The northern kingdom (which consisted of the northern two thirds of modern day Israel) was no more since it was destroyed by the Assyrian Empire in 722 BC. The southern kingdom of Judah would soon be down to the city of Jerusalem which was surrounded by the Assyrians who had just destroyed the northern nation.

On top of all this turmoil, Isaiah has been prophesying some rather harsh things about Judah throughout the first 34 chapters of his book. The people of Judah had been unfaithful and God was going to send them into exile. How would you have felt if you were a believer at this time? You don't know whether or not you're going to have a long term home. Your neighbor to the north has been deported and you appear to be next while your God is mad at you.

How would you have felt? I would feel a lot like the little boy in our introduction. Lost. Alone. Forgotten because my whole world would have been crumbling down around me. It is to people who are feeling lost, alone and forgotten that Isaiah writes the words of our lesson this morning. **"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.'"**

Isaiah delivers a powerful message to those who are feeling lost, alone and forgotten. The Lord still remembers you. He hasn't forgotten you. I know your heart is troubled. I know it is feeling overwhelmed. I know there are things in life which have left you confused and broken. I understand, but know this: the Lord still remembers you. He is coming to save you and nothing can break his promise to you. He will come and make things right.

What a wonderful promise, isn't it? The Lord hasn't forgotten you. He still knows who you are. He still knows what you are going through. He still loves you! It is a message which revives your troubled heart. It is a message which comforts you in distress. It is a message which wraps you up in those big, warm and loving arms you wanted to comfort you. It is a message which reassures you that you're not alone in your troubles and problems and dries your tears.

On the one hand you have this big, beautiful message of comfort and reassurance, but on the other hand your life leaves you feeling all alone and sad. You've been perfectly healthy and not had any health

problems and in less than two months you've had surgery, found out you have stage four cancer and you are now talking about options to squeeze out a few more days on earth rather than curing you and making you all better.

You've gone through numerous treatments for a disease, painful transplants and were even isolated from your family for a time, but what happens? It doesn't take. You have to go through the whole process again, but there is less sand in the hour glass and the race against time is on. These health problems leave you feeling broken and alone. You're scared and honestly the promises which you hear Isaiah make don't mean much to you right now.

Do you know what the cure is for those terrible times? It is hearing your Lord speak his promises to you. **"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.'"** Your world might feel like it is breaking apart and crumbling all around you. Your health is failing. Your loved ones might have abandoned you. You feel alone and depressed, but your Lord's love for you has not changed.

The Lord makes a promise in the Bible. He says, **"I, the Lord, do not change."** Yes, everything around you seems to change. Your health, people's attitudes toward you or others, your feelings and emotions, but the one thing which is constant and does not change is your Lord's love for you. Right now, he loves you the same way he did before you got horrible news about your health or other horrible news. He promised he will always remember you and he will. Always.

How will this promise comfort you during dark days in your life? **"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. 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. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs."** Did you hear the incredible things your Lord promises you in these verses?

He speaks about those who are having health problems. The Lord promises he has the ability to open the eyes of the blind and enable the deaf to hear. He has the power to make the lame walk and the mute sing. He says the thirsty will come and find refreshment and renewal in the waters of salvation. These verses promise the Lord has the ability to work miracles, but do they mean he is going to work them on your behalf and get rid of your disease and loneliness?

Not necessarily. He could work them in your life, but these verses point us in an even better direction than a few extra years on earth. They reveal a portrait of our savior to us which we see fulfilled in our gospel lesson. **"Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man."**

"After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, 'Ephphatha!' (which means, 'Be opened!'). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was

loosened and he began to speak plainly.” Our gospel lesson reveals Jesus fulfilling one of the promises which Isaiah makes in our Old Testament lesson when he heals a deaf/mute man.

Did you notice the care Jesus uses? He wants the man to understand what he is doing for him and he takes him aside to make sure it is just the two of them. He then takes his fingers and puts them in the man's ears and touches the man's tongue to signal to him that he is going to do something to help his ears and tongue. Finally, he looks up to heaven and sighs deeply to show his compassion for the man's suffering. What happens? The man's ears are opened and his tongue is loosed.

Jesus fulfilled the promises which Isaiah made in our Old Testament lesson. He still has the power to perform miracles in our day too. He works through modern medicine and skilled doctors. He still heals people without explanation. He still has these abilities, but what should we take home and use when the miracles don't come and your health doesn't get better? Or his answer to your prayers seems to be no rather than yes? What can you use?

Did you see the way Jesus dealt with the deaf/mute? He pulled him aside. He spoke to him one on one. He showed the man his love for him through his sigh and the intimate way he performed the miracle. What can you and I take and use from the fact Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's promises? You and I can make time for Jesus to do for us what he did for the deaf/mute man. Let Jesus pull you aside where it is just you and him so that he can speak to you individually with no one else around.

Let him pour his heart out to you about the way he loves you by reminding you has died for you and risen from the dead for you. Let him share the wonder and joys which await you in heaven where loneliness and sorrow are gone because loneliness, sorrow, pain, fighting, disease and all the other horrible parts of this world don't exist anymore because he has done away with them. Let him remind you he still loves you the same way he always has even if your life is falling apart.

How is Jesus able to speak to you today? He is doing it right now through his called servant whom he has tasked with sharing his word with you. He speaks to you through your Bibles which you read at home (and if you need help finding some good spots to read, talk to me and I'll point you in a good direction). He speaks to you through Christian family and friends who remind you that you are not alone because Jesus hasn't forgotten you. He will remember you. Always. Amen.