

**SERMON – FAITH LUTHERAN – ADVENT MIDWEEK 2014 – ISAIAH 40:9-11**

9 O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain;  
O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength,  
Lift it up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!”  
10 Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, And His arm shall rule for Him;  
Behold, His reward is with Him, And His work before Him.  
11 He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm,  
And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young.

Dear friends in Christ,

It would have been a long time since there had been any good news being proclaimed from anywhere in the Jerusalem vicinity.

The context in these chapters lets us see Isaiah was looking ahead from his time to the centuries which were to follow.

He lived to the time of king Hezekiah – which was followed 100 years later by the Babylonian captivity – a time when we know that the city of Jerusalem with its Temple was completely leveled by the Babylonians – any worship there ceased. All that were left in the area were a few of the poorest of the poor to farm and raise animals in the hills.

So the only voices that were raised would have been those of the coyotes and sheep echoing through the deserted hills and canyons.

Why the change that Isaiah speaks of now?

Why should the city of Jerusalem, the home of Mount Zion – why should this desolate, deserted location of the leveled city speak up now?

Because those Jews who had been taken into captivity were coming home!

The true God of the Jews was leading His people home!

The captivity was over!

The 70 long years that they had waited and wept by the waters of Babylon were now in the past. Now the Lord was stretching out His strong arm and fulfilling the promise of deliverance He had given to the people long ago.

The Persian king Cyrus was now in charge - and the command was for anyone in the former Babylonian empire to send the Jews back with gifts and assistance.

King Cyrus himself, and later King Darius as well – offered money out of the national treasury to help finance the building of the temple.

God was seeing to it that His people were well taken care of!

It is no wonder that the prophet urges the news to be proclaimed loud and clear for all to hear!  
“Behold your God!”

Look who He is and what He does for His people!

Yes, they rebelled against Him and disobeyed Him – but look at the power and the love and the

care with which He is bringing them back and forgiving them!

As we celebrate Advent these weeks, we too are encouraging one another to “Behold our God” – that God who is coming – who came to this earth as a Baby, who has come to our hearts through the Gospel, who will be coming again on the Last Day.

For starters – we remember our condition before He came to us!  
Just like the hills around Jerusalem were desolate and dead and empty – so was our condition!  
We were lost, we were dead in sins, we were headed straight for no where but hell itself!

But now? Look! “Behold our God!”  
Look at how He comes to us to rescue His people!  
**STRONG!**

Oh, I know - when we think of that little Baby born in Bethlehem we think of anything but strength – but we remember who that Baby was and IS –  
He is the Son of God Himself – who yes, set aside the full use of His power as God for a time, humbling Himself, and “coming in the likeness of man – and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled Himself even to the point of death on the cross.”

But “now God has highly exalted Him!”  
Now that He has shown Himself to be victorious over sin, death, and the devil by His resurrection from the dead – now He rules over us – His people who He has purchased with His own blood, who have become His own family by faith worked by the Holy Spirit.

And that victorious, glorified God, who rules with divine power and strength, puts all that power and strength to use as He “cares for us as does a shepherd.”

We might wonder how power and gentleness could fit together – but I think of teaching piano –  
It is the strong who are the best at gentleness!

Feeding – gathering – carrying – leading –  
Psalm 23 – lie down green pastures – restores my soul - fear no evil – cup runs over  
Taking us to the still waters of His Word – holding us close through our troubles and afflictions –  
taking us finally to heaven itself for His name’s sake.

That is who your Lord is! “Behold your God!”

But while the context is of Jerusalem, of Zion, calling out to God’s people –  
and for us that we encourage each other with the Great News that our God is strong and caring –

As Jesus says, “there are other sheep of this fold – them also I must bring – and they will hear My voice - and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”

But how will those who are not yet in Jesus' flock hear – unless you and I who are in His flock  
TELL THEM!

We live in a world which is not friendly to our Lord, nor to the message that He would have us  
proclaim.

And as a result, the devil tempts us really hard to keep our big mouths shut – after all – there are  
certain places where it just isn't right to talk religion.

You may well also be made fun of for letting others know you are one of those Christians.

Or - you want to speak up about creation – that old antiquated idea that science turned its back  
on decades ago?

You think God's Word needs to be brought to bear on what society says about abortion and  
homosexuality?

You want to start talking about the world coming to an end after the FOOLISHNESS of that man  
last year who had up all those billboards – and proved to be wrong?

You want to tell other people to see your God?

Or so the devil wants us to think – he wants to get us to be quiet – to be afraid of what the world  
can do to you!

But what does Isaiah say? “Lift up your voice with strength – lift it up – be not afraid!”

Don't hide the message – shout it from mountains!

Don't put your light under a basket, but up on a light stand for all to see!

As the angels told those who came to the empty tomb Easter morning – GO and TELL!

As David wrote in Psalm 56

Psalm 56:11 In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

Psalm 118:5-6

5 I called on the Lord in distress; The Lord answered me and set me in a broad place. 6 The Lord  
is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?

Behold our God!

Don't be afraid to tell others of what God has already done for you!

Tell them –

Look who we were – a lost and condemned sinner!

He has purchased and won me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil!

And now He is my Good Shepherd, and knows me as His very own!

Caring for me as I cast my cares upon Him –

Bringing His blessings to pass as I commit my way to Him.

Behold your God – and tell of Him who is your strength and your shepherd!

Amen.