

SERMON FOR SUN. SEPT. 5 AND WED. SEPT. 8

Pent 15B Isaiah 35: 4-7a “The Antidote to Anxiety.”

Dear fellow redeemed of, by and for Christ, today we heard from the prophet Isaiah: **“Say to those who have an anxious heart . . .”**

That’s you, isn’t it? For like the people in Isaiah’s day, who among us does *not* have an anxious heart?

Anxious about what has happened in the past, or anxious about what is going to happen in the future.

Anxious about what we have done or what we have not done. Anxious for others and for ourselves.

Anxious as our minds are filled with “wouldas, couldas and shouldas” and with fears of all shapes and sizes.

Anxious as the sin and evil in our world - and in us! - seems so powerful and threatening, and the church and what is good - in the world and in us! - seems so small and so weak.

Yes, we are those with anxious hearts. Anxious like the people who watch hurricanes form and draw near. They sandbag and add plywood to their homes, but they are so powerful and threatening.

So it is so often with you and me - we see the fires of evil, the storms of hell, and the attacks of doubt rising against us in our world, in our lives, even in our hearts, and we grow anxious, worried, and fearful.

But to those who have an anxious heart, Isaiah has a Word of Godly hope for us.

“Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.”

With those words, Isaiah would take our eyes *off* of the threats that cause us such anxiety, and off of ourselves who can’t do anything about them. For when we focus on the threats or on ourselves, we just wind up increasing our anxiety.

But with his words, ***Isaiah focuses us on the One who is greater*** - greater than whatever is causing us anxiety, and greater than ourselves.

And not only the One who is greater, but who has promised to come in vengeance against the sin and evil that has afflicted His creation; Who has promised to come and save *you*.

For as long as you live in this world and life, you will have many anxiety-causing afflictions; and no shortage of troubles; you will not be immune to the effects of sin within and without.

But as Jesus told the disciples on the night he was betrayed, **“In this world, you will have much tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world.”**

So you have God’s promise: you’re not alone in your troubles, and whatever is causing you trouble will not ultimately win. ***He will come and save you.***

Now, to be sure, there are times when it seems as if the sin and evil in this world *are* winning, and as if you *are* alone, and that God is very far away from coming and saving.

At such times we are like the deaf and mute man in the Holy Gospel today. ***Our eyes work***, and we see the fires and storms of sin and evil wreaking havoc in the world.

And our hearts work, our consciences convicting us of the sin and evil in our lives and that which is in us.

Why are we so anxious? **Because our ears aren’t working.** Our ears of faith, to hear the promises of God. To listen to God’s promise of forgiveness and hope.

And because we do not hear, we too have a *speech impediment* - something blocking our speech: namely, the anxiety of our hearts that hinders our prayers and praise and seeks to drive us to despair and unbelief.

But today Mark shows us that the One Isaiah pointed us to, the antidote for anxious hearts, has come! For when He comes, Isaiah says, **“the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.”**

And Mark relates, **“And taking him aside from the crowd privately, [Jesus] put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue.**

And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.”

And this was no one-time event; Jesus has done this *for you*. For you, it was not the spit of His tongue but the water of the font.

And the word that was spoken was not **Ephphatha**, but ***I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. But the result was the same.***

When you were baptized, Jesus took you aside and made you His own.

When you were baptized, Jesus opened your ears to His Word and gave you His Spirit and faith.

When you were baptized, Jesus released your tongue to speak in prayer and praise. When you were baptized, the words of Isaiah the prophet became yours: ***He came and saved you.***

And that is true because in, with, and under the water of Holy Baptism is the power and life of Jesus' cross.

His cross, where the vengeance and recompense of God were poured out upon the Son of God for our sins.

His cross, where the fires of evil were quenched by His blood and the storms of hell were silenced with His forgiveness.

His cross, where the Son of God hung as your substitute - that condemned in your place and dying your death, you may have His life. Eternal life.

And that is now precisely what is given to you in Holy Baptism - the life of Christ and His victory.

For He who rose from the dead and victoriously opened the grave now opens deaf ears and loosens mute tongues; forgives sins and gives peace; gives hope and raises you to life as a child of God.

Life, even amid many afflictions. While the afflictions of this world seek to rob you of *this* life, they cannot rob you of *His* life.

And so, the antidote to our anxiety is Christ.

When we focus on ourselves - or on the faith which we're supposed to have! - anxiety is sure to come because we are so weak and so often succumb to temptation; that we become frightened and bewildered.

But to us, in such a helpless state, Christ has come and still comes. For as Isaiah saw and proclaimed, Christ is not the greater one far away in heaven, but the greater one *here for you.*

Here, in your life. Here in your suffering.

Here in your despair. Here in your aloneness.

Here in your struggle with anxious thoughts.

Here in your dying days.

For He who has overcome all these things has *not* promised that you will *not* have experience trial, troubles and tribulation, but that He will be with you and overcome them for you too.

Perhaps you wish that victory would come a bit sooner - I'm sure the people in Isaiah's day did too! But it is not your victory, but His. And He will do it. You have His promise.

And that promise is what enables us to live securely in an insecure world. To live the life that James was talking about today - a life of faith and good works.

Paul was inspired to write to the Philippians, **“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”**

Apart from Christ and His promises, anxiety is our daily bread. But in Christ and His promises, we by faith receive His life and love and gifts. And, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we good works for our neighbors, in effect giving His life and love and gifts to them. Not because we **have to**, but because with His life and victory, we **can**.

The bottom line is that all that we have is a gift from Him. Gifts to help us in our anxiety, and gifts to help others in theirs.

Gifts to live out the vocations you were given. Gifts which give us, and our neighbors, hope and peace.

For they are gifts from **our Lord [who] does all things well**. Who is working in you and through you according to His good and gracious will.

Even if now, for a time, you are struggling; and even if your struggling - perhaps like the deaf man - has gone on all your life. The struggle is not pointless or meaningless or hopeless.

From it your Lord will bring good. He will do well. He will have compassion. He will save.

And to accomplish this, He has come and is here for you today - here in His body and blood for you to eat and to drink. To save you by giving you the forgiveness, faith, strength, and peace that you so desperately need.

So repent of your self-reliance and come. Come, receive Him, and find rest for your anxious heart.

Come, dear child of God, for the giver of ears, the looser of tongues, the forgiver of sins, the opener of graves, and the giver of life is here for you. Come and rest in Him.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.