

GOD HAS COME WITH VENGEANCE

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church on this fiftieth day before the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord:

All of you say to the anxious of heart, "Be strong!"

"Fear not!"

"All of you - behold your God!"

With vengeance He will come: with retribution God will come!¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

In this part-week's Old Testament reading, Isaiah uses a beautiful form of language construction to communicate the return of the Lord to save His people who are going into captivity. This form does translate smoothly into our language. It is used to draw the hearer into and out of the focus of each line. Hear the first verse from Isaiah in a very literal rendering:

All of you strengthen weak hands, and tottering knees make firm all of you.²

The verse begins and ends with the indication of just who the prophet is addressing. That is, "all of you." That y'all is for all those who are of the faith, who have been trusting in God for deliverance, and who see their world crumbling about them. It could have been written today, for us. Our economy, our world crumbles; real personal wealth continues to decrease; deflation of our dollars continues in an ever increasing spiral to erode purchasing power; the government sanctioned murder of pre-born human beings gains even more acceptance and political legality: and our military involvement in Afghanistan (and maybe Korea and Africa) has begun to grow beyond our

¹ *Isaiah 35:4.*

² *Isaiah 35:3.*

infrastructure's ability to support and respond to them. Isaiah still speaks to God's people:

*All of you strengthen weak hands, and tottering knees make firm all of you.*³

The prophet, and thus God, is speaking to all of you, you who are the faithful, yet whose confidence in the basic safety and security of your life, and even the God-pleasing parts of your lifestyle, is being shaken to the core. All of you are, as those over 25 centuries ago, being addressed, and called back to the center. That is, God wants you to strengthen hands that may be trembling as you hand over your last dollars for food, medical care, the daily necessities of life. He desires that you make firm knees tottering on account of the trials of the pressures of this world, the devil, and your own sinful flesh.

Those physical actions of strengthening and making firm, as a response to troubled minds and spirits, God does not expect you to do on your own, nor even on account of His command. Yes, He has given His command, but immediately upon it He, through Isaiah, gives the words that give you God's power to follow God's command.

Hear again our theme verse for the next three days:

*All of you say to the anxious of heart, "Be strong!" "Fear not!" "All of you - behold your God!" With vengeance He will come: with retribution God will come!*⁴

God is calling out to His people, you, who He just indicated that He knows are enfeebled and weakened by worldly events and their lack of using the faith. He calls

³ *Isaiah 35:3.*

⁴ *Isaiah 35:4.*

out to His people, to those who have been shaken to their core on account of nervous expectation about the things soon to come. The first encouragement the faithful who might find themselves anxious of heart:

“Be strong!”

That is easy to say. But where will this strength come from? God says next,

“Fear not!”

Now the faithful have a clue. This is the Word of God that He gives whenever He, in His person appears, or when one of His sent spirit messengers appears, to one of the faithful. *“Fear not!”* is to ring through their ears, into their hearts, to let them know that God is with them.

For the ancient faithful, when these words were first proclaimed, memories of the Lord’s call to *“Fear not!”* in dozens of recorded instances: to Abraham; to Hagar; to Isaac; to Jacob; and so forth were to come flooding back into their consciousness. To you, who have the record of the New Testament, *“Fear not!”* also brings with it remembrances of the words to Zechariah, to Mary, to Joseph, to the shepherds at Jesus’ birth, and lastly to the elder John witnessing the resurrected, ascended and ruling Lord of the Universe – Jesus. The encouragement of the prophet continues:

“All of you - behold your God!”

Weak hands, tottering knees, anxious hearts of believers are strengthened, fear is removed because they, you, behold their God. When the eyes of the faithful are lifted up from seeing the troubles of this world toward their God, they receive His

strength, His firmness, His fearlessness. The call of the prophet, therefore the call of God, is for His faithful people to look to Him for strength and courage in the midst of impending personal and worldly doom.

God's grace for sinners is manifest even in the words the prophet uses, "*All of you - behold your God!*" That cry goes out to those who are sinning in fearing, trembling and anxiousness - all failures against the First Table of the Law. God calls those who are sinning and reminds them that He is still *their* God!

The words to the ancient faithful who were in fear on account of their not remaining attached to the firm, sure, perfect and complete promises of God were declared to return them to the Faith. "*All of you - behold your God!*" rings out today to call you who are of the Faith and yet anxious of heart to see God and to receive comfort from beholding Him. Where are you to find Him?

In the Word.

In your Baptism.

In the elements of the Table.

In Holy Absolution.

In the means He has chosen: "*All of you - behold your God!*" *With vengeance He will come: with retribution God will come!*⁵

For the ancients, that meant waiting and looking forward in the Faith. For you, me, and all the faithful since the death of Jesus, that means looking backward in the

⁵ *Isaiah* 35:4.

Faith. The ancients waited for centuries for their deliverance. Many of you have lived all your lives in that Deliverance! That time of vengeance and retribution has come, and it will be brought to full consummation on the Last Day. When did God come with vengeance for all His people (think carefully before you answer)?

His vengeance was poured out on the cross. At Calvary, as the Son of Man hung upon the accursed tree, God wreaked His vengeance against sin, the devil, and as Jesus breathed His last, upon death. In One Person, Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Mary and Son of God, the full wrath of God was poured out. Here, in beholding this image of God's Victory and recompense, you are free to be led to find consolation and comfort when the pressures of this world, your flesh and the devil press in upon you.

In the crucifixion of our Lord you may find the retribution of God for all you have ever done, or will ever do, to offend Him and His Holy Word. In the daily remembrance of His Baptism of you, you are free to return to Him, confessing your sins and believing firmly that He has washed them from you. In the regular reception of His gifts - His very Body and Blood - that of the One Who bore His wrath, vengeance and retribution for you, you are free to receive forgiveness. How do you know and believe those realities are for you?

First, because you believe what you regularly confess in the words of the ancient creeds (and if you don't - keep saying them, you will! For what people sing or say becomes what they believe)! Second, you have the witness of Isaiah's prophecy having been fulfilled as recorded in St. Luke's words for this day. It is no mistake or

whim that the fathers of the Church paired the following promise with their fulfillment by Jesus in today's Gospel:

Then shall be opened eyes of blind men and ears of the deaf men unstopped.⁶

Repeatedly this Epiphany Season you who have been faithful in hearing God's Word proclaimed here have had the revelation of prophecy fulfilled poured in your ears. You have beheld the Promise of God in the Christ, who each Sunday in this series, has been declared as the One who fulfilled each week's prophecies. That is why the next words of Isaiah are fitting for this last Sunday of the Epiphany Season, as they speak of the time of God's delivering His people from the worries, fears, and anxieties of this world and our flesh:

Then will leap like (a) hart lame man, and sing tongues of mute. For they will break forth in desert, waters, and streams in arid places,⁷ and will become the burning sand into pools and thirsty ground into springs of waters, (the) haunt of jackals, where each found its resting place, (there will be) the grass for reeds and rushes.⁸

You have heard of Jesus healing the lame. You may recall the Lord restoring speech to those who could not speak. Those healings were real, and testified to, and handed down without error or change for almost 2,000 years! The beautiful language of the prophet Isaiah takes the hearer into the depths of desolation without God and out into the bounties He provides.

The imagery of the Day of God's Deliverance has been declared over the past six weeks. You have heard of the living waters that Jesus came to bring, and brings even

⁶ *Isaiah* 35:5.

⁷ *Isaiah* 35:6.

⁸ *Isaiah* 35:7.

now in His Word of forgiveness and life. You have beheld, in Word and Sacraments, the dead raised, the spiritually arid refreshed and those whose faith was desolate become those whose faith is abundant.

All of this has been done in you, for you and to you by the Lord who spoke long ago through His prophets, and even now through His Son. With the Gospel of Jesus, His atoning death for you sins, fresh in your ears, and very soon, fresh in your mouths, carry forth from here for one another His Word of the Day:

All of you say to the anxious of heart, "Be strong!"

"Fear not!"

"All of you - behold your God!"

With vengeance He will come: with retribution God (has and) will come!⁹

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Quinquagesima (Lutheran Service Book one-year series)

Isaiah 35:3-7; I Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 18:31-43

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TRANSLATION, SECOND DRAFT

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