

September 9, 2018
Isaiah 35:4-7; (James 2:1-10, 14-18); Mark 7:31-37
Pastor Scott Brayall

Creation is magnificent. Whether you're hiking on a path with mountain and trees towering above you and lush forest and rivers beneath you, or if you're under the starry sky on the plains and you can see nothing but stars above and a flat, endless horizon below. Moments like this can really bring meaning to our confession that God has made me and all creatures. In so many ways the creation around us seems to speak of His goodness and creativity and care. But it can also be scary—sometimes with reason, other times not. When a bear is encroaching upon your backyard or if a tornado is forecasted to tear through town, you have good reason to fear what could happen and prepare for the worst. But other times, nature just scares us. You can be walking in the woods and hear a rustle in the trees and in a second your imagination goes wild with what could be there. Martin Luther says that after the fall into sin, Adam and Eve would have been terrified by something as harmless as a leaf rustling in the breeze. This is the tip of the iceberg of things we fear, Yet it is into this world that God comes in the person of his Son to save us and, in doing so, to restore us to life with him in his creation. Fear not, for God Comes to Save His Fallen Creation.

It seems like all around us, anxious hearts abound. Our days are marked, from the moment our eyes open until we finally fall asleep at night, by anxiety, for our sin has subjected creation to futility and brokenness.

There are the uncertainties of life. Disease stalks healthy bodies. Hearing, eyesight, and mobility can and are lost in mere seconds to accident, disease, or old age.

Neither health nor wealth can be guaranteed, no matter how hard you work for them

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The Lord speaks of these last days as times of stress, perplexity, and anxiety (see, for example, Lk 21:25–26). Far from evolving toward a state of harmony and perfection, the earth and the life it sustains hurtles headlong toward dissolution and destruction, both environmentally and ethically. Because of sin, the law of entropy, the rule of chaos seems to be true. Things on their own seem to only get worse and worse, not better, so we rightfully fear what today might hold, let alone something as far off as tomorrow.

Apart from the seemingly innocent chaos of the world around us, it also appears that purposeful evil triumphs.

The righteous suffer while the wicked seem to prosper

Those who volunteer find their work does not do the good they hope for and is in fact despised by those who do nothing. Those who give of their time and money find their gifts abused and neglected, stolen by those who already have what they need and their efforts only make it in portion to those who truly need it.

And while evil individuals get their way, the corrupt systems as a whole thrive. Injustice prevails on national and international levels.

Innocent bystanders all around the world are injured and killed by those with evil intent.

Those who would try and better themselves are penalized in prisons with no hope of reconciliation and restoration.

Whole governments are corrupt and bring about violence and poverty instead of the peace and security they promise to provide.

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Among all of this evil and chaos in the world that tries to kill the body, Christians find themselves persecuted for their faith, their souls attacked for trying to share this life we have so that others may have hope and salvation and life beyond this world.

The end of every human biography, those good and those evil, Christians or not, is finally death . . . which is sin's ultimate payoff.

Despite the chaos, the fear, the ultimate ending, it was Into this world God comes to save. He came as Isaiah foretold and His bold words set troubled hearts at peace: "Be strong; fear not!" (v 4).

Now, when God says "fear not," pay attention, for this is far different from an empty platitude. Much more than a mere wish and even more than a command; it is a word that itself casts out our fears, for God is himself acting.

In both the Old and New Testaments, God announces his salvific actions, His saving work with a word that bids anxious hearts "fear not."

He says to his Israel, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine" (Is 43:1b). Through the angel, he proclaims to Bethlehem's astonished shepherds, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Lk 2:10). To the terrified disciples in the midst of a stormy sea, he says, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid" (Mk 6:50). The risen Lord speaks to those confused women on Easter morning: "Do not be afraid" (Mt 28:10).

This is the message I am authorized in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ to announce to you this morning: "Be strong; fear not."

God's coming in the flesh to save you is the remedy for your fear. With these words, God would tenderly remind you that he is not against you but for you in every

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way (Rom 8:1, 31–39). He hasn't drawn near in order to keep a closer eye on your every move, judging you more severely, but He instead came in the flesh to be present with you

If God were your enemy, would he clothe himself in your flesh and blood and suffer and die on the cross to save you? Of course not! If His goal was to judge you for your sin, He could have easily just left you alone until the end of the world, not leaving His glorious throne and instead simply doing away with you without getting His hands dirty. But instead He clothed Himself with your flesh and endured the suffering of our world in order to know what we endure and to make our suffering His in fact—and having suffered all, He executed judgment on that which has brought the suffering.

His vengeance, his judgment on your enemies (sin, death, and the devil), was executed in Christ, who bore your sins in his body to the cross and has answered for each and every one of them with his own perfect and precious blood. Raised from the dead, he speaks to you the word of another sure judgment to steal away your doubts and fears. It is the absolution: “Your sins are forgiven.”

Jesus Christ is your Brother. He comes to do what the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament promised. He comes as the One who fulfills the “messianic manifesto,” who took upon Himself to fulfill what we could not and bring what we couldn't even hope for. This good news for you and for all creation, the news of healing and restoration promised in the words of Isaiah is echoed in our Gospel text.

The reconciling work of our Brother is not a rescue from creation but a restoration of creation . . . that includes you. Too often we are quick to decide that God has saved us to leave behind that which is broken, but instead He has brought the remedy in order to fix what was broken and lifeless and in fact against life.

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God does not extract us from creation, but instead God created us in body and soul to live within creation. Recall again how Luther confesses all that God has given us in creation in his explanation of the First Article. All the creaturely gifts you receive are out of God's fatherly, divine goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness in you. That is to say that these gifts, absolutely everything good that you have, are on account of Christ and through him.

While Sin brought disorder and destruction, disease and death into creation, into that which God designed to be a blessing to us, it was by the blood of his cross that Christ has reconciled all things in heaven and on earth to himself (Col 1:18–20) and desires to bless and sustain us through this corrupt yet reconciled creation.

In fact all of creation is groaning for its restoration and revitalization. It knows that it is broken and is awaiting its perfection once again; as much as creation will be perfected, we who are the crowning jewels of creation, will be perfected and brought to the perfect new heaven and the new earth.

Christ has redeemed us in creation, purchasing and winning us in body and soul for himself, to be the children of God, here and now. In our text, the signs of redemption are bodily: the eyes of the blind are opened, the ears of the deaf hear, the lame walk, the mute sing. In the Large Catechism, Luther reminds us that “where the soul is healed, the body is helped as well” (LC V 68). This happens in our Gospel reading and today as well.

Through the atoning work of Jesus Christ, we receive all good things from our Father, including all the gifts of the body, such as sight, hearing, mobility, and speech. We receive this healing spiritually and physically as our eyes are opened daily to both observe the beauty of His world around us but also to see the goodness of His grace and

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love to us. Our ears are opened to hear the voice of children and the sound of singing, but also to hear the Gospel news proclaimed for us, over and over. And our legs are given mobility so that we can run errands and exercise and play, but also so that we can go and share the Gospel. And our tongues are loosed so that we can encourage those around us and share advice and tell jokes, but also to sing our gracious God's praise. We are brought these blessings in both body and soul—our entire being cared for.

Recall the blessing proclaimed by the pastor in the Communion liturgy: "The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in body and soul to life everlasting. Depart in peace. Your sins are forgiven" And to that Gospel, that good news, our response can only be one of doxology, of right praise. Recall the words of the catechism: "For all this it is my duty to thank, praise, serve, and obey him."

Conclusion: A Lutheran theologian of the last century, Werner Elert, said, "Some live in the light of the Last Day, others live in its shadow" (Elert, *Last Things* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1974], 28). Dear redeemed children of God, you live in the light of the Last Day, for the Savior who has come into this distressed and dying world is your redeeming Brother. He will come again and with him bring new heavens and a new earth, the home of righteousness (2 Pet 3:13). In the meantime, we wait not with trembling at all that is untrustworthy and uncertain in this crumbling universe, shaking at the sound of every rustling leaf in the autumn wind nor the most paralyzing rumors of terror which seem all too close, but we wait as those redeemed in body and soul by Christ the crucified. He says to you once again, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come to save you." That is a promise you can trust, for God is faithful, and he will do it. Amen.