

“The Hope of No Fear.”

Isaiah 7:10-16

Has there ever been a time when you were fearful? Has there even been a time when you did not know what to expect next? Has there ever been a time when the future seemed bleak and you did not know where to turn next? These are questions that we all face at some point in our lives. It has been recorded throughout history that there have been time when things seemed pretty bleak or that fear was running among us all. It's a part of the human experience whether we want it to be there or not. We'll experience it at some point throughout time.

The text this week covers those questions quite a bit. In the time they were written the King of Judah was fearful of what would happen in the future. He lived in fear of the Assyrians to the north and was fearful that they would march on the land of Judah and take everything that he and the kingdom held dear to themselves. What would you do if you lived in this situation?

In our history as Americans we have had times when we were thought that we would face totally ruin at the hands of those would opposed us. I know that many of you have lived through many of these events and have experienced fear first hand. I think that every generation faces a moment when the end seemed at hand. Yet even in the biggest times of despair there has been a beacon of hope for the people. As Christians we know that hope is present and real for us and that is the hope that we can experience through Jesus Christ.

From family experience and stories, I tend to think about World War II, when my grandfather was drafted to serve in the army in Europe. I have heard many stories when it was thought that the German army could have simply come across the ocean and begin to attack us on the east coast. It was a real fear that my grandmother has expressed to me in stories concerning that time period.

Another story from World War II that stands out to me is the attack on Pearl Harbor, which launched the US into armed conflict. I recently watched the movie Pearl Harbor and while that movie is a fictionalized account of the attack, it carries with me the sense of what people would have experienced in that event. It would have seemed that there would have been nothing that could have stopped the Japanese army from attacking the west coast of the United States. Our defenses were down. We had lost many brave sailors in the deliberate attack. We had been attacked right at our front door.

But with World War II, there was hope people. People worked together for the war effort. People began to support the United States effort to push through the hardship and bring about peace and stop the rule of tyranny. Many people gave their all for support of the United States and the war effort. It is something that I honor and believe we should remember for future generations.

The moment that I feel where my age group felt that we were under attack were the terrorist attacks on September 11. I remember the day almost to letter. I remember listening to the radio of the events coming about as I was getting my braces removed in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. I remember going to the mall for lunch and then the mall closing because of the risk of attacks on places where large groups gathering. I remember driving back from Bartlesville and seeing that the price of gasoline reached record high levels. I remember going to the bank and there being tons of people withdrawing large amounts of cash. Lastly, I remember seeing the video footage of the attacks for the very first time.

It was a scary time period for me. It was a scary time period for all of us. Yet in all of that, we rallied as a people and did our best to move forward. I felt that we were uniting as a

people in the face of adversity. We tried to remember what was the most dear to us. We tried to move forward with hope and work through the despair of the time.

These are important things to keep in our mind when we read the passage of Isaiah. It is through our experience that we can begin to understand what was occurring in the lives of the people of Judah. In the time that this prophecy of chapter 7 occurred, it was not long after the northern tribes of Israel had been wiped off the map by the Assyrians. There was much to fear from the invaders to the north. King Ahaz knew this and lived in fear.

There are several reasons that King Ahaz had a great fear, which was justifiable. First off, the Assyrians were known for their brutality. The bible does not paint a good picture of the Assyrians. They were known to attack people with great speed and little mercy. They had the intent to conquer a people and take all they could from the people conquered. They knew that in order to expand they would have to take down their neighbors and their resources and use them greedily for their own advantage.

The other thing that the Assyrians would do is that they would completely displace the people that they had conquered. What they would do is that they would take the leaders of the people and send them to other parts of the empire. Then they would do the same with important groups. This was done so that the conquered people could not gather the strength to find their new oppressors. This is where we get the idea of the lost tribes of Israel, because the Assyrians scattered the people throughout their empire and the people that made up the ten northern tribes of Israel were gone and never allowed to return to their homeland as long as the Assyrians were in power.

So to counter all of this, King Ahaz simply stayed in a bunker out of fear in case the Assyrians decided to come after Judah. He hid deep inside the land of Judah so that if they were

invaded it would be difficult for the Assyrians to find him. He had a great fear of being wiped off the face of the earth.

Yet because of this fear of obliteration by invaders from the north, the kingdom of Judah was falling apart. The people were becoming fearful as well and were losing hope. Farmers began to be fearful and agriculture which had been prosperous began to fail. The society that King Ahaz was to lead was falling apart due to this fear. It was as if there was a great feminine but there was plenty of food available. The people needed to find hope in order to survive on their own, whether or not the Assyrians came down from the north.

To give the people hope, Isaiah gives King Ahaz and the people a prophecy from God. Isaiah lays down the foundation for a child that will come forth from a virgin and restore the people. This child would know what was right and would have the power to refuse evil in the world. This was meant to give the people a reason to live and so that there would be no famine in the land of plenty.

How often in our lives do we find ourselves fearful of the future and then we decide to hide in our own bunkers? What would happen to us if we decided to live in fear and not allow our lives to move forward? It happens to us all the time whether we know it or not. It is a perfectly natural emotion when we encounter events in our lives that cause us to back off and be very cautious. But as Christians we do not need to live in fear of the future. The prophecy that Isaiah gave to the people is true to us this day because we have Jesus Christ coming to us who will deliver us from fear and death. We can move forward in our lives and live in the Spirit of God and no longer need to hide in the bunkers of life.

As an example of living into the hope, I remember a fellow student that I had gone to high school with. He was a friend that we kept in touch and enjoyed each other's company while

we were in school. We were in band together and took several classes together because we had common interests. He was a good person. He was a person that you would have no trouble hanging out with on a Friday or Saturday evening listening to the old records that he collected with fervor.

However with this friend he began to have trouble in college. He had difficulty being a student and keep his life together. This was highly unusual for this friend because he was always on top of things in school and was really quite intelligent. School was easy for him but he did not let this inflate his ego. Of all the people that I had gone to school with he was one of those people that would push forward no matter what and be successful in whatever he put his mind and heart to.

It was through other friends that I learned of the trouble that my friend was going through. I contacted him to find out what was going on and express that I would be there to help out if he needed anything. What was happening to him is that he had just been diagnosed with schizophrenia. This floored me totally. Never in a million years would I imagine him with this disease. By the time I had gotten in touch with him he had been on medication that managed his condition quite well. He still had some symptoms that he was working through with a psychologist. I was thankful that he was getting the help that he needed and he responded to treatment well.

Over time he shared with me that after his diagnosis he lived in fear. He was fearful that he would have a psychotic break or an anxiety attack where he would harm another person or himself unintentionally. He was scared of his current living situation. He had heard so many stories where people with schizophrenia were not able to live normal lives or have normal

relationships with people. So what he did was that he hid from people and simply retracted into himself which is when he began to suffer in school and other parts of his life.

Throughout this time as he was beginning to respond to medication, he was learning to work through his fears. The medication and medical professionals that were working with him were beginning to show a beacon of hope in a life that he could be a normal person. He was indeed a good person and he was learning to have hope.

I talked with this friend just recently and in talking in the phone you would never have guessed that he suffered with his medical condition. He was going to graduate this winter from college and he was becoming a job hunter extraordinaire so he could begin his career as a graphic artist. I am very thankful to God and praised God that he was going to be alright.

My friend's story is a personal account of hiding in fear from the world. He had faced the Assyrian army at his doorstep and through hope he pushed through and could live a life that was without fear. He took the hope offered to him and began to live a full and complete life.

In this season of advent, we know that we don't have to live a life in fear. We have hope coming to us in the form of a child that would do great things in his life for all people. Christ came into the world so that we would no longer have to live a life of fear. We don't have to be King Ahaz and allow the world to collapse into fear. Christ came into the world so that we would have Immanuel, God with us. Christ is the source of hope for all people of the world. In this time of the year we should embrace Christ and the hope offered to us.

In all of the despair that we go through in life, remember that there is no reason to fear. There is no reason to worry about tomorrow, for Christ the Lord of All is in our lives. If you are fearful of the future and you do not know where to turn, then come and talk with us. We are here for you so that you no longer need to fear the invaders of despair and death. Christ is there

waiting for you to take that step out of fear and into a life that will bring uncountable blessings in your life. Jesus Christ has come for you and can become a part of your life so that you can have the hope of a new life. Christ is there ready for you to come to Him and find a new life. We are here so that you can have a new life in Christ. May God be with you and all of us in this time of anticipation of hope for all people. Amen.