

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota

Isaiah 36:1-3, 13-20; 37:1-7; 2:1-4
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
November 18, 2018

There was an amazing amount of fruit/nuts on the trees out in the woods this summer/fall. My hunting partners and I wondered what it meant. There was an article in the Brainerd Dispatch about this on October 21. It was entitled, “**Are trees foretelling a bad winter this year with all those seeds and acorns?**” Winter seems to be getting a harsh, early start in November. Long story short – this abundant year in the forest is called a “**mast year.**” There is no scientific proof to show this as a sign of bad winters to come. There is also no proof that this happens the year before a tree is going to die. What scientists believe happens is trees, every two-seven years, produce an abundance of seed for the **preservation of the species.** The huge number of seeds is meant to exceed the number that could possibly be consumed by our friends the squirrels and birds thus assuring that some seeds survive to **provide future generations.**

Future generations were in jeopardy in Isaiah’s day. Our text for today recounts a time when, once again, Israel was under siege from the marching enemy armies of **Assyria.** Isaiah, the prophet, paints a dramatic picture of just how low the strength and morale of the people had gotten. The Israelites’ pregnant women didn’t even have the **strength to deliver their unborn babies.** The enemy king sends an envoy who tells the people not to trust their king or their god. The envoy taunts that the kings and gods of the other nations they conquered weren’t able to save them. The God of Israel won’t be able to save you either. The envoy then offers that if they just submit to Assyria, they can have nice houses to live in, plenty to eat and will only have to put up with being shipped off into exile in foreign lands. What would your answer be?

Once again, this week, good **King Hezekiah,** in terror, turned to the **prophet, Isaiah.** God then spoke through Isaiah, “**Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard. . . I myself will put a spirit in (the Assyrian king,) so that he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land; I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.**” How many of the world’s tyrants have died at the hands of their own people, hiding in their precious palace of wealth and power? There

is **no denial**, in our text, of very real troubles in our lives and world. However, there is a **promise of help now** and of **hope for the future**.

Our world tells us, **“Don’t trust God. Rely on human might and your own strength, your solid income, the US military, a powerful, bold president. The United States can handle any enemy or challenge that comes our way.”** That’s what they said about the Roman Empire, The Ottoman Empire, the United Kingdom, the Japanese Empire, the Soviet Union. . . Meanwhile, God says, **“Trust me. Not only will I deliver you from trouble, but I will bless you. Your strength, kings, enemies and treasures will come and go. But, I will always deliver, carry and bless you.”**

What is the basic truth in our text? Trust your life into the Lord’s hands and do not trust your **own strength, kings, wealth** or **armies** to save you.

For the ancient Israelites, **rescue followed**. And not only rescue, but the future promise from God that **someday, “All”** the nations shall stream to the house of the Lord. And even more, **someday**, God will sit in judgment over the nations of the world and they all **“shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”** Here it is. **This is what God has in mind for God’s world – everyone close and in harmony** with God and all of humanity. God’s judgment means no more war, killing and death. Instead, **everlasting peace**. . . This all, once again, points forward to the **Prince of Peace** who came on that first Christmas and who will be here again for Christmas 2018. And on the last day. . . Your last day or the world’s last day – whichever comes first.

What is the most hopeful word/promise? The Lord is faithfully moving down through human history, toward the day when there will be **no more war**. The day will come when **instruments of hatred, violence and death** will be melted down and turned into **tools of planting, growth and life**. So, is this just a **foolish hope for simple people**, or is it a **glimpse of Almighty God’s coming kingdom?** Who do you trust?

So, for you, do today's troubles **hold you captive and threaten to drive you to defeat**? Or, do today's troubles **motivate you to pursue God's ultimate promised future** for humanity? In your own life? In our world? Here at First Lutheran? Do we try to hang onto the glory days of the past? Do we submit to the decline of Christian churches all over the nation? Do we give up and say there is nothing we can do? Or, do we trust God to work with us and **lead us into the kind of future that God wills for our world**? Do we serve as the hands and feet of Jesus?

Is there really a God, or have you just been coming here all these years to socialize with your friends? Or to act religious? Or have you been coming to this place because you **believe God lives and rules**? Do you **believe Jesus came to a cross and grave for your salvation** and for the salvation of the whole world? Do you **believe that Jesus is coming again** on the last day to finish God's forgiving, healing and life-giving work?

This year, trees laden with fruit and seeds, is a **mast year**. At least some seeds will survive to provide for future generations. **Elsie Paulson**, well up into her nineties, gave me a special offering envelope for her church this week. It was marked "**Youth Ministry**." Her son, **John**, asked me to open the envelope and look at the amount she wrote on her check. **\$83**. Why was that number significant? Elsie wrote the check in thanksgiving for the 83 years she has lived since being confirmed in the Christian faith. Elsie was raised in the faith. She raised her kids in the faith. Today, Elsie wants to enable this church to keep on sharing the faith with the kids. Thank you, Elsie.

Martin Luther was once asked what he would do if he learned that tomorrow was the last day, the day of Jesus' return. Luther responded, "**I'd go out in the garden and plant a tree**." **Luther always taught** and **I believe** God only asks of us:

1. Love and trust God to care for you.
2. That sets you free to love and care for the neighbor and world.

Tree planting shows our trust in God. Tree planting is good for the world. Do you have some trees to plant? **Swords into plowshares**? A **warring world** into a **peaceful kingdom for eternity**? We are not going to bring this about. Christ will. And he has invited you and me to be a part of it. Thanks be to God. Amen.