Text: Isaiah 35:4-7

**Introduction**

“Say to those who have an anxious heart…”

Isn’t that everybody these days?

And it’s not like there are not legitimate things to be anxious about.

We still have a proxy war in Eastern Europe with an honest nuclear power. Along with another proxy war cooking in the middle east. And if you’ve been paying attention we’ve moved carrier groups closer to that last on, and brought one into dry dock for maintenance, Taiwan is sitting rather open right now. All while “who exactly is the President?” – regardless of your partisan rooting – is an honest question.

The race to determine the next President stands on a knife’s edge. And partisans of both stripes are convinced the republic ends if the other person is elected.

The nation’s economy produced about a million fewer jobs than reported last year in the largest adjustment ever issued. And the recent jobs report was enough to take the wind out of the sails of the market.

Social contagions seem to be running wild in the land. Whether they be school shootings all copying Columbine, or the cutting off the healthy genitals of 12 year olds because of “gender dysphoria.” Protecting your kids and grandkids from such insanity can be anxiety inducing.

But all of those things are kind of like background anxiety. We are mostly exposed to it through the television and people trying to spread anxiety. There are the honest anxieties we actually live with.

Does the balance budget this month or if you are fortunate this year? Or maybe your anxiety isn’t over this month or this year, but over the length of a retirement. Might I outlive my stash?

Looking at how our church budget is doing for this year, I figure those might be hitting close. We’ll be talking more about that in the near future. And just saying that I’ve probably added some anxiety.

Maybe turning from material anxieties there are spiritual anxieties. Churches as institutions have certainly been in better shape. But maybe closer to home, have our kids or grandkids or friends or siblings left the faith? Or joined heretics? Or worse? And has the lack of Jesus caused them to try and fill that god-shaped hole with something else? Something by definition much worse.

Say to those who have an anxious heart…

**Text**

Before we continue with what God tells Isaiah to say, we should ground this in the life of the people it was originally spoken to. Isaiah is preaching to faithful Israel on the Eve of the Babylonian Exile. He is preaching to the people who will be carried off – or at least their children. If the earlier prophets preached repentance so that Israel or Judah might be saved, Isaiah’s call is to preach such that they might hear, but not understand, see, but never perceive. That their hearts might become dull and their ears heavy, lest they repent. And if a 10th remains, burn it again. Preach until the cities lie waste without inhabitant and the place is a desert.

Now if you read Isaiah after that chapter six call, I think he bucks against that a bit. Isaiah preaches and hopes that they will repent and God will relent. Early on he’s like “this is just God’s way. He’s said the same thing before to get Israel’s attention.” But by this point in the book, that’s gone. The remnant knows that exile is coming. So much so that the judgement is assumed and Isaiah starts preaching about the promise. In this case the promise to those who know that exile is coming or that they will spend their entire lives in exile.

Maybe my heart is just full of anxiety, but I feel that situation. Even if every Christian is supposed to know that we are all exiles. As St. Peter would write his letter to the elect exiles of the diaspora. There is a special anxiety of knowing something big will be changing, against already living in that change.

But God tells Isaiah to say to those who have an anxious heart. – “Be Strong and fear not.”

**Christology**

Why should we be strong and fear not? God, you see the mountain of anxieties. And none of them are imaginary. It is not like we are worrying about a tsunami in Arizona, or worrying about a Canadian invasion, or some other thing. You are telling me to be strong and fear not at the same time as you are telling your people they are going to be carted off to Babylon. That doesn’t seem fair. Explain yourself.

“Ok, I will.”

“Behold…look and perceive, listen and hear, unclog those ears, sharpen your hearts…behold…”

“You God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.”

There are three things there: vengeance, recompense of God, salvation. And in the way that Hebrew poetry works we are meant to ponder them all together. How do they overlap? How are they the same thing? How are they different?

I think you have to take the last one first as the unifying theme. Behold…He will come and save you. And this Christ has done. In Isaiah’s time it was the promise that God would come, would send his servant, and he would restore Israel from exile. And God does this through Cyrus – the Persian King God calls his servant. God comes and saves his people. But that salvation – as miraculous as it might have been – was less than expected or satisfactory. It took forever to rebuild the temple, and the one that was established was just less. The heir of David never really took the throne again. They try and make it work, but it all just kinda degrades. The prophets dwindle away. Until a thrilling voice starts speaking on Jordan’s bank. And they are always under the rule of some corruption. But now Christ himself has come. And God himself has saved you. That corruption that hangs so close due to sin, is forgiven. Our inability to keep the law, is not held against us. For Christ has paid the penalty on that cross. And today that salvation comes to you. You are a child of the living God. And this exile will not be forever, but you shall see God face to face.

And when we see God face to face how shall he come? With vengeance and recompence.

With vengeance…vengeance against those who harmed and mistreated and abused his sheep. Vengeance against those who ignored Lazarus at the gate. Vengeance against those who would demand bricks without straw. Vengeance against all the unjust judges and corrupt shepherds who made hard the life of his people and muddied the waters they drank. That day of the Lord is a day of darkness. A day of vengeance against those who mistreated His little ones.

With recompence…The Day of the Lord is also the day when the scales are made more than even. The promises that God has given are made full. Those who have left mother and father for Christ receive back. Those who have born the heat of the day are given the shade of the almighty. Those who have born the cross are brought forward to the front of the table. God repays his debts. He has promised this, and he shall deliver.

**Moral**

Be strong and fear not.

Those anxieties? Paul would call them these light momentary afflictions. And remember that Paul was talking about prison, and scourges and shipwrecks and beatings. Light momentary afflictions.

Those anxieties are just the powers that be, the spirits of the air attempting to get us to despair. To think that God has abandoned us. To imagine that we are on our own. But we are not. Christ has triumphed. Be strong and fear not. A fancy way of saying have faith. God will come with his salvation. A salvation of vengeance and recompense.

Have faith that the work of God is always for the good of his people.

**Eschatological**

It is in that faith that the rest of what God says comes to us.

Is faith the eyes of the blind are opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. When we let those anxieties control us we are blinded and deaf to what God says. But in faith we hear and see.

The lame leap like the dear and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. It is a small thing, but also not so small a thing. Today, for the first time in a while, the choir again sang for joy. Call it a downpayment on the heavenly choir. But we do in this service join with angels and archangels and all the host of heaven. We join with them now in our humble way. But one day with a great voice.

It is the last bit that tells us a bit more how God works I think. God works thought death and resurrection. We are buried under anxieties. Many of which we can do nothing about. They are just the background of the exile. But when we might think we are in the wilderness or the burning sand it all that remains. That is when God makes the waters to break forth. That is when God makes a pool and a spring.

At the moment the anxieties might overwhelm, that is the moment faith is strongest. That is the moment God comes and saves.

Be strong, fear not. Your God will come and save you. Amen.