Isaiah 35:3-6, Luke 2:8-20

“No fear in trusting God”

What a wonderful supportive community you are. After last Sunday’s sermon I wasn’t sure what would happen but then you get your picture in the paper and everything changes. You need to know that there was one mistake where I was misquoted in that article as Clayton Frackman quickly pointed out to me. I was quoted saying, when we drove along the Amalfi Coast in Italy on the way back from our first Sunday in Italy as two newly married 24 year olds that it was the most beautiful place on the plane, but they left out when I said, until I came to Strasburg. Yeah, I must have said that.

Well, I didn’t think I would have to be writing a sermon for this week, but I guess this is not the end of the world as we know it and I do feel fine. We have been looking at No Fear as we live in a nation gripped by fear for more than a decade after 9-11, gripped by fear as we gather our children close to our side after the massacre of the innocents in Newtown. So how do we live with No Fear? Today we look at No Fear in Trusting God. We probably should have started this series with this sermon, because the focus is going to be on trusting God, or trust and obey as that great old hymn states, and that is what makes us fearless. Able to trust and obey.

If you think about it, our very lives are built around trust. We trust our spouses to be faithful. Our children trust us to protect and provide. You trust me to study and bring the Word of God from Scripture to you. All of our relationships are built on trust and the degree to which that trust dominates and dictates our actions will reflect upon how healthy a relationship is. If you trust your friends, your spouse, your coworkers, then you should be doing okay. When that trust erodes, then you get into real problems.

Today we are going to apply that in our relationship with our God. It absolutely has to be built on trust. But trust doesn’t come easy or naturally. It comes from a lifetime of experience, it comes from work that we put into our relationship with God. It strikes me as a bit peculiar when people tell me why they don’t feel God’s presence in their lives. I ask them how many hours do they spend working on that relationship and they look at me as if I’m crazy. Trust in God come as a result of our work in living with God and allowing God to intersect in our lives and have an impact on our lives.

Today we are looking at the shepherds who loved to trust God and discovered that Jesus is Savior, Messiah, and Lord. Isaiah speaks to us about how fear manifests itself when we understand God to be far away from us, and how important it is for us to trust in him. We find that trust exhibited by the shepherds. Let’s read about that now.

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There is so much that can be said about trusting in the Lord. Trust carries with it the implication of vulnerability and we all have our limits with that. I remember receiving a phone call from the school in Florida when Rachel was in 1st grade and they said that I had to come quickly to the school because she had an epileptic seizure. I was terrified. I raced to school in tears, got there and they assured me that she had only passed out, something that she is known to do periodically. We are used to it now.

But the whole possibility of my daughter having epilepsy flashed through my mind and I realized that I really haven’t been tested in my trust in the Lord in the those areas of my life that I really care about. I’m not sure I would have the trust that I would need to have to allow God by himself to handle that. Maybe the line that I draw is Lord, I can trust you in everything, but once you ask me to trust you in regards to my kids, well, I’m not sure I’m quite willing to be that vulnerable, that trusting. This type of trust doesn’t come naturally, one has to learn that type of trust, oftentimes in the throes of a crisis or after years of being able to hear your Savior speak to you as you spend hours in prayer and communicating with God. When life is going well, it is easier to say and even genuinely think that we have a certain level of trust in God. But until it is tested, our level of trust is never fully known. But it is this very trust that defines whether we will be able to live without fear as God would want us to live.

The prophet Isaiah speaks to a profound trust in God that gives us words to deal with tragedies and realities in our life and world such as Newtown. The question of where is God in the midst of all of this is really a question of trust. Isaiah, if you look at our first Scripture, speaks to that: Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He could not say the first phrase, without being able to confidently stand upon that second phrase. Here is your God. Your God has never left, he has always been by your side. Open your eyes and see how he is walking with you through this experience. Say to those fearful of heart this time of year as they celebrate their first Christmas alone without their spouse, here is your God. God will come, vs. 4 tells us, and save you. Incredible words of comfort and consolation and confidence. God is here, he will come and save us.

Let’s just be sure that we have a certain understanding for this word save that we can apply from here on out for the rest of the sermons that I ever preach here. The word save. Let’s just define it briefly and then whenever I mention it you know what I mean by it. Save in the Greek, I know we are in Isaiah but we will be looking at it again in Luke, can mean both save as in deliver you from a predicament, or something even worse than a predicament. But save you can also mean heal you from an infirmity. Okay, so whenever I say save and it comes from Scripture it means both deliver you and heal you. So it has both earthly, healing, and eternal deliverance from sin, meaning. This type of trust in God leads to what? Look at the verses that follow, the eyes of the blind shall see, ears of the deaf unstopped, lame shall leap, mute sing for joy. Trust in God, a life built on a relationship of trust in God can cause the impossible to happen. All of these things are impossible that Isaiah mentions. As the angel tells Mary when she hears of her virginal conception, nothing is impossible with God. Nothing.

This takes us to Luke then. We see the shepherds in Luke, and only in Luke. No other Gospel writer has the shepherds. Today the shepherds reveal themselves in our lives only in the Christmas pageants, and they tend to be the youngest and the cutest and whenever they take the stage we say, aaawwh. We get the most cute reaction from the shepherds. But real life shepherds were anything but cute. Verse 8 tells us that they lived in the fields, now showers, now shelter. Our bathroom has been torn down for a few weeks now, so I’m starting to feel and probably smell a bit like a shepherd. Good thing I have my robe on.

They were one of the least respected members of society. Not educated, looked down upon, and certainly not to be trusted, they were considered thieves. Now this is strange because you would have thought that Jews in the first century would have remembered that their King David was a shepherd, and that Joseph had been a shepherd with his brothers. Even Moses the giver of the law was a shepherd. God chose to give this message of no fear to the shepherds who had a terrible reputation and a very serious credibility problem. Why not send that message to someone who was a little more respected?

Probably because only the shepherds could hear it. They didn’t have the distractions and weren’t tied down to societal expectations. Do you think any of us here could hear the Christmas message as we are frantically baking, looking forward to this afternoon and tomorrow to finish things up, and then rush back to church for the Advent concert because you heard how awesome last week’s was. I made it all the way to Park City on Friday to buy presents for some kids that the social worker at the school asked us to help out, and I got there through the only traffic I have experienced in Lancaster County only to find that I left my wallet on my desk here at the church. I know the angels could have been singing right in my ear that night and I would not have heard them.

God chose the shepherds because they were able to hear. In order to trust God we have to be in a relationship with God where no matter the season of our life, no matter the events in our life, all important events, I know they are, the ability to trust God will provide us with no fear. Those shepherds had that, but not at first. Let’s look at that passage.

In vs. 9 it states that when the angel shows up they were terrified. A single angel, we assume it is Gabriel, even if he is not mentioned by name, because he has shown up in two other places earlier in Luke, with Zechariah and with Mary. The angel greets the shepherds with the same exact words that he uses to greet Zechariah and Mary: Do not be afraid. No fear shepherds, it’s all good. And he tells them why they should not be afraid. I’ve got good news, I’ve got the Gospel and it is all about joy. And here is the joy, today, today, this very day Jesus is born. This is the Christmas message that we find in vs. 11, Today is born for you a Savior, Messiah, the Lord. I know we are getting to the end of our time together for today, but what you will find next is a typical three point sermon where we are going to look at who Jesus is: Savior, Messiah, and Lord. This is what Christmas is all about. This is what Advent is all about, waiting for the coming of our Jesus who will remove any fear from our lives because he is our Savior, Messiah, and Lord. Let’s break it down.

A Savior who is able to redeem us from our sin but also heal us of our infirmities, for by his stripes, his sacrifice, we are healed or saved. The Greek soterion means both as we mentioned. Jesus as our Savior means that we believe in miracles of healing. It means we believe in our sin being washed clean and so we are able to live without fear as a redeemed people.

Messiah, it means literally the anointed one and in Greek it is Cristos, or the Christ. An anointed one is the one who is given the reign of power and control over people and kingdoms. The king of Israel would have been anointed, such as Saul, David, Solomon. Jesus as Messiah has power, is omnipotent over the world and all of creation. He even has power and presence over Newtown Connecticut and all of those families. Look at Philippians 3:20 and we read that our citizenship, it literally reads our commonwealth is in heaven.

Finally, Jesus is our Lord, the one who is the Master over every part of our lives. We can’t compartmentalize him in any way. He is Lord of our Sunday, of our marriage, master of the house and all domains, master of our work, master of our dealings with our kids. He has all control. When Jesus is Lord he affects every area of our life. And Jesus will be Lord of all opur life, or none of it.

This is the message the shepherds heard that allowed them to go with haste to Bethlehem, into the big city, into a barn to find Jesus in a manger and to tell all who would listen that this Jesus is Savior, Messiah, and Lord. They trusted that they would be heard, because they trusted in a God who revealed himself to them in a very real way.

What level of trust do you have in God right now? Are we able to block out the stress and the frenetic pace of this time of year and hear today that God is right here, he has control over your life and all of the circumstances that you are facing.

I pray that as you continue to have no fear in each one reach one. When the shepherds left the side of the manger they glorified and praised God. We can do no less. I pray that we would have no fear in serving God by committing time and energy to our relationship with him and with each other. Have no fear in being different from the world. Don’t base your values and moral according to the dictates of the world but rather according to the grace of God and his word. And finally, have no fear in trusting God because it will change your life and those around you , guaranteed. Amen.