



**Isaiah 36:1-3; 13-20; 37:1-7; 2:1-4**

*Sennacherib Threatens Jerusalem*

36 In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah’s reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. 2 Then the king of Assyria sent his field commander with a large army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. When the commander stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Launderer’s Field, 3 Eliakim son of Hilkiah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went out to him.

13 Then the commander stood and called out in Hebrew, “Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! 14 This is what the king says: Do not let Hezekiah deceive you. He cannot deliver you! 15 Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the Lord when he says, ‘The Lord will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.’ 16 “Do not listen to Hezekiah. This is what the king of Assyria says: Make peace with me and come out to me. Then each of you will eat fruit from your own vine and fig tree and drink water from your own cistern, 17 until I come and take you to a land like your own—a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards. 18 “Do not let Hezekiah mislead you when he says, ‘The Lord will deliver us.’ Have the gods of any nations ever delivered their lands from the hand of the king of Assyria? 19 Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they rescued Samaria from my hand? 20 Who of all the gods of these countries have been able to save their lands from me? How then can the Lord deliver Jerusalem from my hand?”

*Jerusalem’s Deliverance Foretold*

37 When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the Lord. 2 He sent Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. 3 They told him, “This is what Hezekiah says: This day is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the moment of birth and there is no strength to deliver them. 4 It may be that the Lord your God will hear the words of the field commander, whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the Lord your God has heard. Therefore pray for the remnant that still survives.”

5 When King Hezekiah’s officials came to Isaiah, 6 Isaiah said to them, “Tell your master, ‘This is what the Lord says: Do not be afraid of what you have heard—those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. 7 Listen! When he hears a certain report, I will make him want to return to his own country, and there I will have him cut down with the sword.’”

*The Mountain of the Lord*

2 This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: 2 In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.

3 Many peoples will come and say,  
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the temple of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us his ways,  
so that we may walk in his paths.”  
The law will go out from Zion,  
the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.  
4 He will judge between the nations  
and will settle disputes for many peoples.  
They will beat their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not take up sword against nation,  
nor will they train for war anymore.

HEZEKIAH WAS A GOOD KING. The book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings describes him in chapter 18 this way: “He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, just as his ancestor David had done... The Lord was with him wherever he went.”

He purged the temple and holy places of idols, he reformed the priesthood. He worked to be a faithful king for his people.

And he still faced invasion by the Assyrians.

When we hear of people like him, we remember that the *Lord being with him wherever he went* didn't mean bad things never happened to him. It meant that he wasn't alone in the midst of what life sent his way.

Other stories in scripture that record other invasions will often place the responsibility square on the shoulders of the invaded people, as a punishment for their unfaithfulness. In the book of Jeremiah, he instructs the people that **if** they change their ways, **if** they follow God, **then** God will dwell with them.

Sometimes Israel seems to see their relationship with God conditionally. That doesn't seem to be the case with Hezekiah.

As far as we can see, Hezekiah has done all he has been instructed, and the Assyrian's chief of staff, the Rabshakeh, *which is certainly the coolest job title in the world*, shows up at the gates and starts offering people a different story.

**Do not** listen to Hezekiah.

**Do not** rely on God.

**Do not** ignore the fact that no *other countries' gods have been able to withstand Assyria*.

**Do not** trust your own thoughts.

*You should be afraid, so trust us. Yes, we're invading your country, and soon we'll be carting you off to exile, but for now, we'll let you live in your own home, and eat from your own gardens.*

It's a tough place to be for sure.

Hezekiah tears his garments and puts on sackcloth, a sign of mourning.

While we maybe hope for a more robust response from Hezekiah, *the guy that God was with wherever he went*, perhaps tilting toward despair isn't always a bad response. His despair is more active than we often think of the word. His despair is not giving up. His despair is a frank acknowledgement of the situation on the ground.

He sends his people to meet with the prophet Isaiah. He enters into active and visible signs of mourning that indicate to the people that he is aware of the gravity of the situation.

Rabshakeh has a lot of “do nots” in his speech— “do not trust God”, “do not trust our own need for self determination and liberty”, “do not trust Hezekiah”. The response from Isaiah also includes a “do not”.

**“Do not be afraid.”**

We all know of world leaders throughout the centuries who have convinced people to go against their own interests, to go against their own values, because the leaders have whipped up fear in the people they claim to serve. They have convinced people to settle for a mild captivity, rather than risk death. Political leaders tell us to be very afraid—of each other, of power, of other people. And when we are led by our fears and not our hopes, we fall prey to lies and we forget about hope.

Bad leaders set up false alternatives. If you don't do X, then Y will certainly happen. The king of Assyria, and his mouthpiece, the Rabshakeh, come from a long line of despots, power hungry rulers, and petty tyrants. They want us to be afraid. Afraid of strangers and afraid of each other. I think that's what has Hezekiah so worried. **A compelling argument from the enemy at the gates is hard to counter, even when we know it is a lie.** It *sounds* better. It inspires more confidence. It offers *immediate* benefits, even if the long-term consequences are bad.

As I read this story in my bible study, I realized how disappointed I was with Isaiah's first response to the tragedy. **Do not be afraid** is good and all, but is hard to set aside fear when Rabshakeh is yelling at you from the gates, telling you just how much there is to fear. And then Isaiah reports that God says “*I myself will put a spirit in him, 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.*”

A rumor?

He will hear a rumor. And then Rabshakeh will die offstage, later on, and none of the people he's terrorizing now will be there to witness it.

I don't know about you, but I want the response to bullies like the Rabshakeh to be BIG and BOLD and CLEARLY on the side of SWIFT JUSTICE.

*Rumors? Justice later on?*

For those of us who want to be faithful to God, to trust in God and not in earthly leaders who threaten us with fear—this is the challenge. God's promises are not quick fixes on our terms.

We don't get to tell God how to deal with Rabshakeh. We don't get to decide "I'm sure that some day God will fix this, but in the meantime, I'm going to hedge my bets and trust that the king of Assyria is my best bet for the moment."

What is it mean for us to not be afraid? Especially when the counter message—to be very afraid—makes so much more sense for anyone reading the news.

What can we accomplish if we're not afraid? We'll still have some fear, which is a helpful trait and to which we should attend. But what could we accomplish, as a nation, as a congregation, if we decided we weren't going to let fear be the only story we listen to when it yells at us at the city gates?

This month marked the 84<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass, when Nazis burned and destroyed Jewish stores, homes, and synagogues, while German citizens stood by. At least 267 synagogues were destroyed. Hundreds of people were killed. Tens of thousands of Jewish men were arrested and taken to camps.

There is an echo of the Rabshakeh in what happened in Germany. The shock and awe of the Nazi behavior must have been like the Assyrian invasion, in some ways. And the call to trust in the leadership of people who are harming your fellow citizens—if you don't cause trouble, you'll be safe—it is an appealing, if untrue call.

*Is anyone safe when society collapses like that?*

We may think we're safe, but there is not safety for any of us, when some of us could be carted off to camps, or held in detention at the border, or deported because we don't "look" like citizens.

In Germany, for all of the people who were persuaded to be afraid by Hitler, the 20<sup>th</sup> century Rabshakeh, and his calls to go along, to ignore what they were seeing—there were also people who heard Isaiah's words "do not be afraid."

I heard a story on NPR by reporter Uri Berliner a few years ago that has stuck with me. His then 94-year-old father was a Jewish child in Germany in 1938 who remembered Kristallnacht. His family's story illustrates what happens when we respond to fear with more fear and when we respond to it with hope.

Uri's father escaped Germany as part of a movement that started after Kristallnacht. The Kinder Transport, or children's transport, pulled thousands of Jewish kids out of Germany right before the war started. 10,000 of them found shelter in the UK, and others went to other countries in Europe. His father found refuge with a family in Sweden, who kept him safe, at possible risk to themselves. He emigrated to the U.S. as a 22-year-old man, where he found asylum and safety on our shores as a refugee. *Do not be afraid.*

The boy's parents were unable to get out of Germany.

They were sheltered by some friends, Charlotte and Fritz Mynarek, until someone reported them. His parents were sent to a concentration camp, where they both perished. The man who had sheltered them was sent to a labor camp, where he died. His wife was arrested and sent to Ravensbruck camp for the crime of sheltering her friends. Charlotte survived the war, and later found Uri's father to tell him what had happened to his parents. *"My dear boy ... you are still very young and have your life ahead of you."*

Go forth and live.

There is no promise that tragedy will not befall us when we follow God's call *to not be afraid*, when we respond with hope and faith. Like Hezekiah, like the Mynareks, our faith in God shapes our response to the news of the world, not the other way around.

It is a tragedy that the Mynareks died doing what is right. It would also have been a tragedy, had they lived, doing what was wrong. The person who reported them to the Gestapo may have survived the war. Which person would you rather be? The one whose fear leads them to do the wrong thing? Or the one who overcomes their fear to do the right thing?

I pray our world doesn't fracture again as it did in Hitler's Germany, and in Rabshakeh's Assyria. But if we want to hold it together, we can't be led by our fear. We have to be led by our hope. We have to remember we belong to each other. We have to stand firmly against anti-semitism when it rears its head.

When hatred is voiced from political leaders it may seem a clearer danger than when it is voiced by people like media clown Kanye West or NBA player Kyrie Irving, but we cannot allow such rhetoric to get a pass, or it slowly normalizes. Anti-semitism is a sin.

Last night, there was yet another shooting, to add to the long list of shootings this year. This time it was in a LGBTQ nightclub in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Some politicians, religious leaders, and Rabshakehs of today have told people to fear our gay, lesbian, and transgender siblings. And fear leads to distrust, hatred, and

violence. Today, we pray for the many victims of this crime. And I hope we'll double down in our commitment to be clear and strong advocates for the LGBTQ community.

Mother Theresa is quoted as saying, **"if we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other."**

I invite you to read along in Isaiah this week. See how it works out for Hezekiah who responds to words of fear with faith.

What could we accomplish if we remember, if we choose, not to let our fear define us?

We are in the process of putting the budget together for next year, seeking to be faithful stewards and responsible planners, and also to plan for our hopes and dreams. Like Hezekiah, we acknowledge our worries. And we work for our hopes. We are continuing to shore up our reserves and also planning to hire a part-time youth educator. We are hoping to increase the number of concerts, events, and service opportunities. We are very optimistic about the future of Calvary while also being aware of the challenges. We trust that if we seek to be faithful to God and what God is dreaming for Calvary, that all of the unknowns will sort themselves out. When we pledge our resources to the church, when we build a budget that dreams of the future, we are choosing to trust God and not our fears.

Abraham Lincoln once said **"Be sure you put your feet in the right place, then stand firm."** I looked up that quote to make sure Lincoln actually said it. I know not to trust everything I read on the internet. And he did say those words. To a woman he was helping to get across a muddy road. From paving stone to paving stone, one step at a time.

Isn't that how we're supposed to move through life? We often think about the big-ness of the world's problems and how overwhelming they are. But our faith calls us to not be afraid, and to be sure we put our feet in the right place, and then stand firm. And it is in those smaller moments that we complete the journey.

Listen to the final section of our assigned scripture passage today, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of Isaiah: The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> In days to come

the mountain of the Lord's house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills;  
all the nations shall stream to it.

<sup>3</sup> Many peoples shall come and say,  
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.'

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

<sup>4</sup> He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning-hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.

The violence of the Rabshakeh, yelling at the city gates manages, seeks to compel people to act out of their fear.

The vision of Isaiah, of nations streaming to God's holy mountain so God can teach us the ways of peace—**that is a vision that lasts**. And one we can lift up every time people try to compel us toward fear. Do not fear, God tells us. For one day, we will learn God's ways and take God's paths and we will know peace.