**Do Not Be Afraid**

**Genesis 46:1-7**

2nd Sunday after Christmas

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text finds God speaking to Israel, to Jacob, telling him not to be afraid of going down to Egypt.

To be fair with Jacob, it is understandable that he is a bit nervous about the whole thing. He was sure that his favorite son, Joseph, has been dead for a while now – at least his other sons had declared that to be true after playing a trick on Joseph and selling him into slavery.

Famine hits the land and he had sent his sons to Egypt to get grain. They did and met the Egyptian governor who was overlord of all the grain in this time of famine – the interpreter of dreams who had prepared Egypt for the seven years of famine.

What grain they brought back did not last, so they had to go back to Egypt. But then there was request of this “Egyptian governor” to bring Benjamin, the only other son born to Rachel if they want more food. A request which grieves Jacob deeply, but to which he finally consents.

Upon their return home from Egypt, they come to Jacob with Benjamin. Even more, they informed Jacob that Joseph had revealed himself to them in Egypt – and that he was the Egyptian governor, the one overlord under Pharaoh in this time of famine.

Now, it is requested that he also come to Egypt. There he will see Joseph. There he will be cared for. There it will be well.

Jacob is not a young man anymore and this is a long journey. This whole story about Joseph being alive does not make any sense. Egypt has not exactly been a friendly nation in the past.

Is it any wonder that Jacob is reluctant, that there is a bit of hesitancy and fear in his heart and mind? Of course! He has seen what the world has done, even aware now that his own sons had lied to him. How badly did it sting to now know that they had grievously betrayed him – and Joseph – in what they had done to their own brother.

What is it that makes you afraid? Is it the increasing number of people who are contracting COVID? And the rising number of them that are now being hospitalized? Do you know of someone on oxygen because of how this disease has affected them? Is there now a certain amount of fear in you life because of it?

To be fair, that is just the tip of the iceberg of what brings fear into your life since the beginning of this panic-demic. There is the skyrocketing cost of food – the fear of the ability to afford it. And that is compounded by the fear of whether what we need will even be available due to a growing lack of supplies.

What about the fears that were – and still are – a part of our daily life. Will my cancer return? What is causing that pain the last few days, it isn’t just when I wake up in the morning – it is there all day? Is my job secure? Will I get another fifty thousand miles out of this car, since I cannot afford a different one now? I pray the furnace lasts this whole winter, the repairman was already out once, and it is nearing its last legs.

I am sure you can add to that list of things which bring fear into your life on a daily basis. You have seen life in this world – in human flesh. You know there are no assurances in life, and there are things that certainly look to be out of control.

Today we are celebrate the 2nd Sunday after Christmas – on this 9th day of Christmas – and our Gospel lesson tells us of Herod’s sending the soldiers to kill all the male children under two years of age in the Bethlehem area. As this slaughter of children is carried out as an attempt kill Him who is our King of kings,

Joseph, having been told by God to flee with our infant Lord to Egypt, is already enroute.

Terror and fear filled the people of that region as the soldiers tramped and murdered. I am also sure that as Joseph fled to Egypt with Mary and Jesus, they were probably a bit afraid.

Our text from Peter’s first epistle reminds us that those who are believers in Christ will share in Christ’s suffering. Oh, joy of joys! We will suffer according to God’s will for our faith, and we must entrust our souls to a faithful Creator – all while continuing to do good.

“Do not be afraid!” Wow, those are terrifying words. We instinctively think about what we are personally doing in that department, “I’m trying not to be, but it isn’t working.”

That is the way it goes, right? We hear those words and we try to do it ourself. The world echoes those words as a deceitful cry all over. It tells us again and again what we can do. It is a mantra recited to us every day, and we fall in the fateful trap Satan sets for us, leading us to trust ourselves – or to feel the depression of the fact that too often we fail.

You have heard the cries of falsehood – the deception that it all relies upon you!

You are enough!

Follow your heart!

The only hindrance to your success is you!

Suck it up, buttercup!

I am not enough, and my heart leads me into all sorts of trouble – and yes, I am a hindrance to any success God might try to work through me. Indeed, what marks success? Is success measured by some worldly standard, or is it is based upon faithfulness to God and trusting Him alone? What we need to learn to say is, “I am strongest when I am trusting not in myself, my works, or my abilities, but trusting God.” That is exactly what our text is declaring to us.

What reason did God give Jacob to not be afraid? Because of God – the great “I AM”, the God of his fathers.

God declared these truths:

I will make you a great nation.

I myself will go down with you.

I will also bring you up again.

Jacob was to entrust himself to a faithful Creator.

He was to trust the One who gave Him life.

He was to trust the One who was going to give His life for Him.

Do not be afraid is God’s desire for you. This is not just some empty command of God for you to do something, trusting that you have the ability to do it on your own.

Martin Luther wrote this concerning God’s instructions:

But we are taught by this example that nothing should be undertaken and attempted contrary to or without the Word of God. Therefore we should arrange our life in such a way that we are sure of walking according to the rule of the Word, whether we are awake or asleep. Finally, we should know that everything we do is of God, who commands, calls, and blesses. For human life is most wretched and is subject to the devil, death, and countless trials, full of the most burdensome troubles and hardships. Therefore it is necessary for the godly to be fortified by the Word of God against Satan, sins, and dangers. If the papists had observed this doctrine, the world would not have overflowed with that flood of human traditions, and the church would not have been defiled so horribly with so many errors.

Therefore it is a great gift of God to live in the light of the Word and the divine calling. For this is the golden and round crown that shines around the heads of the saints, as they are commonly depicted, namely, the Word, which directs the course of life day and night. Thus David says in Ps. 119:105: “Thy Word is a lamp to my feet,” and 2 Peter 1:19 says: “You do well to pay attention to the Word as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns, etc.” Reason is in darkness. Therefore it has need of the light of the Word as a leader and guide. For thus Jacob, when he was afraid to begin this journey contrary to the commandment of God, tarries in Beer-sheba until he may offer sacrifices, pray, and hear God’s Word. And after hearing this Word he now leaps for joy, for he knows that this journey has been consecrated and confirmed by the blessing of God. (Luther, M. (1999). Luther’s Works, vol. 8: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 45-50. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 8, pp. 82–83). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.)

Jacob goes to Beersheba, to offer sacrifice, to give thanks to God, and to hear God’s Word to him.

You have come to Beersheba – the holy place where God speaks and delivers His work to you. God declares to you, “Do not be afraid, I am with you.” God does all the work in casting out fear. He comes to you with His blessing. He promises to keep you. He gives you His Word to do that in you – He gives you His Word made flesh.

Hear His Word to you – His blessing of you – His Christ Jesus to you. In that blessing, do not be afraid. In the name of Jesus. Amen.