



**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School**  
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**First Sunday After Christmas**

**December 31, 2017**

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**“In Quietness & Trust is Your Salvation”**

*(Isaiah 30:15)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it’ (Is. 30:15).*

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...  
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

**Collect:** O God, our Maker and Redeemer, You wonderfully created us and in the incarnation of Your Son yet more wondrously restored our human nature. Grant that we may ever be alive in Him who made Himself to be like us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

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A few weeks ago my wife forwarded a poem to me from the Writer's Almanac. I just love it. It's by John Martin and is entitled, "Bear in Mind." It's about our fears and anxieties, the things we worry about and fixate on (often irrationally), and how we go through life with these fears and anxieties nipping at our heels. Once again, it's entitled "Bear in Mind."

A bear is chasing me through a meadowland  
I'm running as fast as I can but  
he's gaining on me – it seems  
he's always gaining on me.  
I'm running and running but also  
thinking I should just  
turn around and say,  
"Stop it! Stop chasing me. We both  
know you aren't going to catch me.  
All you can ever do is chase me. So,  
think about it – why bother?"

The bear does stop,  
and he sits on his haunches and thinks,  
or seems to think. And then  
the bear says to me,  
"I have to chase you, you know that.  
Or you should. And sure,  
we both know I'll never catch you.  
So, why not give us both a break and  
[you] just stop thinking about me?"

But, with that said, he gets back on four feet,  
sticks his long pink tongue out, licks down

both sides of his snout. Then he sighs, looks behind himself, then at me and says, “Okay, ready when you are.”

And so it resumes, running from the bears of our anxieties. Isn't that like us? Do you have a bear chasing after you? Maybe it's old age, or irrelevance. Maybe it's loneliness, or some disease that runs in your family. We all have our fears, fears that maybe our friends will stop being our friends. Or maybe it's the fear that your savings will run out before you do, and you'll end up in a terrible little apartment which smells of old cigarette smoke masked poorly by Glade. Do you ever catch yourself worrying, and tell yourself you're being irrational. You breathe deeply and maybe remember to say a prayer, but then, soon enough, you're on the run again, and a bear is right on your tail.

One time, long ago, in fact 2700 years ago, the Assyrians swept westward into Canaan and then southward, swallowing up the northern kingdom of Israel. The Assyrians were now poised to take the southern kingdom of Judah. In fact, they have already taken out Judah's outer ring fortresses, leaving Jerusalem, the capital city, exposed and vulnerable.

Judah's allies have already capitulated. The only potential ally left is Egypt. Hezekiah is the king, and Hezekiah's countrymen are lobbying hard for him to make some kind of pact with Egypt. Maybe if the Assyrians saw the horses and chariots of Egypt lining up with the soldiers of Judah, maybe Assyria would have a change of heart and look elsewhere for a land-grab.

Horses and chariots were the “glamour” weapons of the day, and Egypt was widely known for having the best of both. Horses were revered for their speed and strength and aggressiveness. Horses and chariots compounded the strength of any army. Horses and chariots had the same appeal as the Joint Strike Fighters do today.

God's prophet Isaiah is on the scene. His message? “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on

horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel . . . The Egyptians are man, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD stretches out his hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will all perish together” (31:1-3). For Isaiah it was particularly loathsome that the people were looking to Egypt (of all nations) for help; it was from Egyptian slavery centuries before that the Lord delivered them. Now they’re going to forget Yahweh and trust in Pharaoh?

So what is Isaiah recommending? “In quietness and trust is your strength” he tells them, “but you were unwilling, and you said, ‘No! We will flee upon horses’ . . . and ‘we will ride upon swift steeds.’ In response, Isaiah says (or maybe it’s the Lord). “Therefore your pursuers shall be swift.” It sounds sort of like the bear poem, right? As fast a man runs, his fears can run faster. And there are some enemies (sin, death, and the devil) that we can never outrun. So the people are urging Hezekiah to cuddle up with Egypt, but Isaiah says, “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.” Can you imagine? A ruthless enemy is at the front door, and Isaiah says “Repentance and rest is the key.”

Well that didn’t sound good at all to the people, and so they decide they didn’t want to hear from Isaiah anymore. “Give us no more visions” they say to Isaiah. “Tell us pleasant things . . . and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel” (Is. 30:10). Clearly, they had had enough of God’s Word and his prophet. Luther’s Small Catechism come to mind: “We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.” But the people would have none of it.

In any event, putting their hope in Egypt was ill-advised on a number of levels. Egypt was long past her glory days. She was a tired and spent old dragon and was of no help.

“In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.” Part of what’s wrong with the human condition is we have a very hard time doing any of those things when facing our anxieties: it’s hard to repent, and it’s hard to rest. It’s hard to be quiet and it’s hard to trust. Instead, the fight or flight response kicks in. That is, we’re always trying to save ourselves often by fleeing from the bears or confronting them. But sometimes, often times, the best course of action is to repent and rest and quietly trust in the Lord. Psalm 46, “Be still, and know that I am God” (v. 10). Sometimes that’s the most difficult thing to do, and instead we misdirect our trust to someone or something else.

In Deuteronomy 17, God gives some laws to govern the kings of Israel. For example, he is not to acquire much gold or silver. Another law was that he must not acquire many horses for himself or for the nation (v.14ff). The idea here is that if the king has all this military might, he may well start misplacing his trust. He may forget the Lord and trust in his own might instead.

Isn’t this relevant to us today? We have many enemies, some real, others imagined. Who’s going to protect you from the aggression of North Korea, for example? Will it be those three aircraft carriers off the Korean Peninsula? We are certainly grateful for the men and women of the armed forces. They keep those who hate us in check. But we dare not drop the Lord from this equation. Ultimately, he is your refuge and your fortress. Today also, put your trust in the Lord, not in the horses and chariots of Egypt.

Who’s going to save you from that terrible disease? So many times after the surgery I hear people tell me their doctor is widely recognized as one of the best in the nation at this or that. I’m glad we can have confidence in our doctors, but who knew that south central Wisconsin was such a hub for the best medical practices? Besides, what if that doctor moves away, or goes on vacation when you need him, or is just having a bad day like we all do? There will come a time when your condition will render the best team of doctors at

Mayo Clinic absolutely powerless to help. Put your trust in the Lord, not in the horses and chariots of Egypt.

Who's going to save you from being poor in retirement? Will it be your own financial discipline or frugality? Will it be the wisdom of your financial advisor? Will it be good luck? By all means, save aggressively. Use the expertise of a financial advisor. But ultimately, put your trust in the Lord, not in the horses and chariots of Egypt. Do the work, and let God take care of the worrying. Don't let that bear chase you all the day long.

Who's going to save you from sin and death? All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again, nor will they be able to save you from sin and death. You put your trust in the Lord.

One of the consistent lessons of Scripture: misplaced trust results in defeat. We see it right from the start with Adam and Eve trusting in the words of the serpent rather than in the word of the Lord. How'd that work out for them . . . or us? Misplaced trust results in defeat. But the opposite is also true: Isaiah 49, "Those who trust in me will never be put to shame" (v. 23). Romans 10, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced" (v. 11). Psalm 25, "No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame" (v. 3). And our text for today says it most beautifully, "In quietness and in trust shall be your strength . . . blessed are all those who wait for him." Blessed, meaning "happy" are those who trust in the Lord. That is, relying on God is, in itself, a blessing, and leads to a calm and peaceable life, and an inner strength.

You don't need to be running from the bears all your life. You don't need to be trying to fight the bears yourself. You don't need to look to Egypt for rescue. "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength."

Pharaoh wasn't born in Bethlehem for you, and it wasn't your doctor who raised Lazarus from the dead. Your financial planner didn't die on the cross for you. It is the Lord Jesus Christ whose birth we celebrate. He is your Brother and your Friend. He is the one who loves you and

will not leave you. He is the one who put it all on the line for you and died for you. He is the one who vanquished your enemies of sin and death and the devil. He's the one who never moves away or goes on vacation or has a bad day. As our Shepherd, he never slumbers nor sleeps, and the bears and wolves have learned the hard way to steer clear of his rod. He's the one who gives the horse his strength and light its speed, but infinitely stronger and faster. He's the one into whose name you are baptized. He's the one who has written your name into the Lamb's Book of Life.

So you don't need to be constantly on the run from the bears. And you don't always have to be fighting your enemies. And you don't have to look to Pharaoh and his horses for rescue. "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength." Amen.

