



Visions of Wholeness: A Lenten Journey through Isaiah

Week 5

Friends of the Lutheran Center,

The book of Isaiah contains writings stretching over the time the Israelites are pre-exile, in exile, and post-exile. Pre-exile they come to terms with God's judgment for their lack of faithfulness. In exile the people wonder how to live in a foreign land when their ways of life and faith are disrupted. Post-exile those who have been in exile in Babylon and those who were left behind navigate how to rebuild their lives and society. Through all these transitions God speaks. God speaks words of judgment and forgiveness and casts visions of wholeness for all people and creation. Even as the people encounter dislocation and grief, the presence and promises of God journey with them.

During the season of Lent we focus on Jesus' life, ministry, and death. While nowhere in the book of Isaiah is Jesus exactly mentioned, the New Testament writers and theologians throughout history have read Jesus into these texts. In his own life, Jesus even names himself as the fulfillment of some of the promises of Isaiah. The students and friends of the Lutheran Center who wrote these devotions have spent time considering these verses in their original historical context, as well as reflected on them in light of the ministry of Jesus and their own life experiences.

In this devotional we join with our ancestors in faith in hearing the call of God through the words of Isaiah. In these verses and devotions shared by students and friends of The Lutheran Center, you, too, are called to listen, reflect, repent, and receive the promises of God's grace. You are invited to join in God's vision of wholeness for all humanity and creation.

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MONDAY MARCH 28

The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. -Isaiah 50:7

Some might say it is self delusion to say that God helps us when the world is on fire. I believe deep down it is an abiding trust that makes one know they “shall not be put to shame” in the darkest of times as they cling to a hope that God’s promises are true.

The prophet is writing likely in time of exile. Israel’s northern kingdom has been dismantled. This is more of the ongoing tale of Israel being in and out of good relationship with YHWH. And, yet, even in the midst of a removal from their homes, culture, families, land, rites and practices, the prophet declares that “The Lord God helps me.”

Because God’s promises are trustworthy and God freely offers grace and comfort, we are emboldened to declare that when we prepare for the worst and hope for the best, we are not humiliated. Rather, we are supported by a God who helps us.

God of Comfort, be with us during times of despair and difficulty. Holy Spirit, please fill us with a desire to prepare well for all that life brings. Amen.

-Amanda White, Ministry Director

TUESDAY MARCH 29

*Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many.
-Isaiah 51:1-2*

I find that life is not much like the seasons. My time cannot be measured by the shifting of leaves on a tree. Living in an intentional Christian community above The Lutheran Center has shown that life and the time within it is far too complex. I am constantly and simultaneously in a season of joy, mourning, boredom, and elation. This flurrying feat of emotions is exhausting. It is often, in these moments, when being human is so burdensome I think of the poet Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself.” In particular, the line “I contain multitudes.” His words bounce from one canyoned groove of my brain to the next. Containing multitudes is, to me, a reminder of the rock from which I was hewn, a memento of the quarry from which I came. To contain multitudes means that I am not alone. An internal composite sketch of myself would reveal that parts of me are my family, my friends, and the strangers I pass each day. I live in communion with those around me—those rocks from the quarry are in me and I in them.

God Creator, you shaped all of humanity in the image of yourself, all from the same dust. Let us be reminded to love our neighbor in the ways you intended, to care for the multitudes we contain. Amen.

-Lauryl Hebenstreit, Psychology & Ethnic Studies, 2022

WEDNESDAY MARCH 30

For the Lord will comfort Zion; God will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song. -Isaiah 51:3

What I notice in these verses is that while God will *comfort* Zion, God does not magically make all the trials disappear, similar to how wilderness does not turn into a garden overnight. Oftentimes when I'm facing hardships, I pray for Jesus to save me and make all of my unbearable trials go away. However, that's how I *want* God to work, but not always how God truly works.

God will provide hope, growth, and comfort in the midst of these hardships, and while trials may still be present, they are not the end. Looking back at my hardest trials in life, I noticed that while pain was still there, God's hope showed up in small and big moments. I grew through the hard times. While our hardships may not vanish as we want them to, God's promise of love, forgiveness, and hope will always remain.

God who turns wilderness into gardens, thank you for your hope, comfort, and love that remain. Show us the hope you provide us in the midst of whatever trials may come. Amen.

-Melissa Graue, Music Education, 2023

THURSDAY MARCH 31

Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation; for a teaching will go out from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples. I will bring near my deliverance swiftly, my salvation has gone out and my arms will rule the peoples; the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope. -Isaiah 51:4-5

Are you paying attention? I suspect that the last two years have provided you ample opportunity to slow down and pay attention to the world around you. Perhaps you've had to pay attention to the children who have been attending class at home. Or maybe you have been paying attention to signs of COVID-19 and its variants. In any case, I bet you've paid attention to something significant for you in the last few years.

In this text, God proclaims to God's people to pay attention to the most significant thing happening in our lives. God promises that God will swiftly deliver and give salvation to all nations. Through Jesus, the righteous and just one, God brings about salvation. Even the disciples didn't quite understand what Jesus had been telling them about justice and salvation. So pay attention – God's justice continues to swiftly take place in the world for the sake of all nations.

O God, who delivers all of creation through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, open our eyes, hearts, and minds so that we pay attention to your acts of justice and righteousness in the world. Amen.

-Jacob Krueger, Alum, 2017

FRIDAY APRIL 1

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended. -Isaiah 51:6

Space has always been the thing that fascinates me most when thinking about God. This verse reminds us in another way about how amazing creation is. Not only did God create the unthinkable large and harmonious expanse of the universe, but God can and will one day make it “vanish like smoke.” The metaphor that all living beings will die like gnats is fitting considering how incredibly tiny we are in comparison to all of creation. While the first part of this verse shows God’s immense power beyond any comprehension, the second part is even more amazing. A promise that all of this power used to create and destroy the entire universe is used to provide salvation and deliverance to all those living in it that would otherwise have died like gnats.

Lord, let us pause today to appreciate your creation from each blade of grass on the ground to all the galaxies of the universe, and help us to see your unending love for all of creation in the mysteries of the cosmos. Amen.

-Ryan Martz, Meteorology, 2023

SATURDAY APRIL 2

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. -Isaiah 55:1

I love scriptures that start with “Ho!” or “Hark!” or an “Oi!” (ok, maybe that’s just from Ted Lasso). And the reason is, there is something so conspicuous that Scriptures have to grab your attention with an old fashioned “Hey You! Yeah, You!” And so here is another one...a foundational reminder for you and all people who hunger and thirst: God’s Word is for you. God’s Word is for you to take into your being. God’s Word is nourishing and brings lasting life. God’s Word is ready and available to you now. And the best thing is God’s Word is free. Really. There is no price you must pay to receive it. There are no qualifications you must bring forth. God’s Word of love, grace, forgiveness, and redemption are for those who thirst, struggle, hunger, and want. And so... “Hey You! Yeah, You!” Do not forget, God’s Word of grace is for you.

God of all who Hunger, you provide us with nourishment through your promises of goodness and grace. Send your Spirit so all would be fed through your life and love found in Jesus Christ. Amen.

*-Pr Jason Davis, St. Mark’s Lutheran in Huntsville, AL
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