



Visions of Wholeness: A Lenten Journey through Isaiah

Week 6

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.

Emma Grinde

Campus Minister

The Lutheran Center, Lincoln, Nebraska

MONDAY APRIL 4

*Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.
-Isaiah 55:2*

As I got ready to move, I sorted through everything that I owned and was surprised to find that it was a LOT. At first it felt nice to purge, but when I thought about how much of my time and energy had been wasted in order to earn the wages to buy it all, I started to feel angry. Commercials try to sell me the idea that if I purchase their products I can have a happy life. And so I buy and I buy, but the merchandise never lives up to the promise.

In Isaiah, God makes a different pitch: Listen to me and be satisfied. God has something better in store for humanity. God's abundant life is worth spending our time and energy pursuing as we join our lives to this free gift and find what we've always been looking for.

Gracious God, there are many things that promise much and leave us empty. Draw us into your abundant life which fills us with joy. Amen.

-Pr Bridget Jones, Messiah Lutheran Church in Auburn, WA, Alum

TUESDAY APRIL 5

*Let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for God will abundantly pardon.
-Isaiah 55:7*

Outside at recess one day in middle school, when a classmate of mine again made fun of one of my friends, it was the last straw for me and I tackled her to the ground and punched her in the shoulder. My classmate and I soon found ourselves in the principal's office, my jaw set in anger, feeling totally justified in repaying evil with evil.

The principal deescalated the situation and talked with us about how both words and actions can hurt other people. As his lecture started to sink in, my rage receded, my jaw loosened, and I apologized for the harm I'd done. I vowed to the principal I would never hurt anyone again.

While I haven't punched anyone since then, I certainly have hurt people with thoughtless actions and unkind words. In today's verse we hear the good news of God's forgiveness and the assurance that God's mercy doesn't run out.

Pardoning God, you welcome us into your grace. Help us to forsake our wicked ways and unrighteous thoughts, guide us by your mercy that we may be ambassadors of peace. Amen.

- Emma Grinde, Campus Minister, 21-2022

WEDNESDAY APRIL 6

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher
than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
-Isaiah 55:8-9*

The human brain, a beautiful and perplexing component of our lives, can be a place where we stumble and find ourselves trapped. The whirlpool of thoughts we encounter attempts to pull us into a harmful swirl of half-thoughts that stray from the visions of wholeness known by God.

God does not promise us a life without these half-thoughts and falsehoods we are plagued with. However, we can cling to the truth that God's thoughts are higher than the thoughts of our own, just as the heavens are higher than our earthly home. We recognize that we fall short within our actions; however, we often forget that we also fall short within our thoughts. We are human, and will always have half-thoughts in comparison to God's thinking. With this understanding, we can give ourselves grace and ask God for clarity in hopes of attaining whole thinking.

God, help us find comfort knowing that your ways of thinking are higher than our own. Amen.

-Maysyn Sorensen, Mechanical Engineering, 2023

THURSDAY APRIL 7

*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
-Isaiah 55:10-11*

Despite water covering seventy-five percent of the earth's surface, much of life requires salty seas to evaporate and fall fresh from the sky. With little control over amounts or timing, humans have traditionally recognized rain as a gift we receive.

Yet, rain is also promise. When rain falls, wilted plants revive and swollen seeds sprout out of dusty ground. Even after floods and blizzards, life is the inevitable declaration of precipitation. Long before we knew rain as a bond of hydrogen and oxygen, farmers like me received it as a gift bound with promise.

So, too, is God's word. Whether the wilderness be ancient or contemporary, grace drenches our thirsty souls with the promise of new beginnings. We may think wholeness impossible or too far away to hope for. Yet growth does not depend upon us. God speaks and we have nourishment for whatever journey lies ahead.

Creating God, you sustain us with the gift of your Word bound to the promise of new life. Rain your grace down upon us, and then help us to look up and drink it in with gladness, for you are faithful forever. Amen.

-Pr Tim Koester, St. Michael Lutheran Church, Omaha

FRIDAY APRIL 8

Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely separate me from the Lord's people"; and do not let the eunuch say, "I am just a dry tree." I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than children; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. -Isaiah 56:3,5

This passage is a powerful message of inclusion for groups who were and still are ostracized from society. While part of the Gospel in this passage is found in that message of radical inclusion, I find the most potent Gospel in its call for us to be the messengers of acceptance. We are called to be the good news for all those on the margins by allowing them the space they deserve in our midst.

It also makes clear that there is nothing wrong with a foreigner or a eunuch. The foreigner is no less part of God's people, and the eunuch is no less whole. Whenever we cast someone out because of their differentness in mind, body, or background, we are not acting in accordance with God's truth. The negative connotations we give to those differences are invented, but God's love of difference is real.

God, thank you for revealing your complex self in the diversity of your Creation. Help us to see how all diversity is a reflection of you. Amen.

-Brandon Unverferth, English and Religious Studies, 2022

SATURDAY APRIL 9

Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered. -Isaiah 56:8

Palm Sunday tomorrow starts Holy Week, but it may be thought of as "wholly week," as we remember the life-saving work of Christ that brings wholeness for us all. We receive this wholeness through Christ, in the suffering of our Savior for all humankind, and then we look forward to the resurrection of Jesus and later his ascension to be seated at the right hand of God our father. Throughout Lent we intentionally practice repentance and humility before our heavenly king. Our restoration and wholeness is not of our own works, though; it is a gift of God's grace: a gift offered to everyone, no matter who they are. As recounted in the New Testament, Paul carried this message to the Gentiles as the Holy Spirit led him to show us the gift of salvation is not exclusive to one group. The same message applies today: all of us receive God's grace and peace that passes all understanding.

God of all wholeness, we ask your blessing on us today as we begin a week where we are reminded of the wholeness you provide. May we look forward to our everlasting union with all the saints in glory. Amen.

-Kim Hall, Bachelors of Music, 2025, friend of LC

