



Visions of Wholeness: A Lenten Journey through Isaiah

Week 7

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

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MONDAY APRIL 11

*The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.*

-Isaiah 58:11

We've all had times when we have felt worn out, whether physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually and then something has happened that gives us a boost of energy. It could be seeing an old friend for the first time in a long time, seeing your favorite flower sprout in Spring, or listening to a song that is nostalgic to you. Whatever it may be, it helped revitalize you in the short term.

And God was there, guiding you in the moment. God knows and cares for us all when we feel burnt out. As I've been nearing graduation, I've been thinking about God's guiding hand a lot. As the unknown future draws near, remembering that God is always there with us makes the stress of the future a bit more manageable.

Dear God, thank you for providing us things that refresh us when we are worn. Help us to recognize you in these moments as a reminder of your glory. Amen.

-Rebecca Rockefeller, Geography, 2022

TUESDAY APRIL 12

*Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.*

-Isaiah 58:12

The ancient ruins of this passage are that of a society that lost its way. During the exile, many Israelites grew frustrated at what they perceived as God's failure to deliver them. However, their Sabbath worship was merely performative because they exploited their neighbors and workers the rest of the week. God did not deliver them because of their wickedness towards others caught in the same systems of oppression. Worship alone breached God's covenant.

So how do we avoid this mistake and repair the breach in our modern society?

It is by more than worship: God calls us to improve our neighbors' lives materially. In other words, doing God's will on Earth as in Heaven. Longing for a better world is insufficient. We are called to join with God in repairing our world by feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and healing the sick. Only through aiding others may we lay the foundations for future generations.

God of restoration, grant us the dedication and compassion to serve our neighbor according to your will. Soften our hearts of stone so that we may build a more perfect world on the ruins of the old. Amen.

-Zach Kneale, J.D. Candidate, 2023

WEDNESDAY APRIL 13

For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.

-Isaiah 61:8-9

In this passage, God promises an everlasting covenant with God's people. Everlasting. Never ending. Forever. No matter what. And the result of this covenant? All who see them and their descendants will be able to tell that God has blessed them. I find it interesting that it doesn't give us details on how this will be so evident to others—will it be because they're prosperous? Powerful? Hundreds of years after this was written, Jesus gives us an idea of what God's blessings look like. The poor, the humble, the weeping, the excluded...those are the blessed ones. God's everlasting covenant with us through Jesus sets us apart from the rest of the world and turns upside down the world's expectations of who God is and how God works. That's what sets us apart, and in God's typically upside down way, it is in emptying that we are filled and made whole.

God, open our eyes to your promises and your blessings, that we might experience them in the places the rest of the world least expects. Amen.

-Matt Schur, LC Music Director

MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 14

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for God has clothed me with the garments of salvation, covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

-Isaiah 61:10

It is difficult for me to wax theologically on wholeness in a moment of blurring disjunction, in a year when even the winter procrastinates. But then, it's more difficult to discuss wholeness on a day that remembers the death of the disciples' worlds as they knew it. From aching sleep, they awoke to the voice of the Galilean. It quivered with the same desperation that turned his sweat to blood in Gethsemane. Then he was betrayed. Then killed.

He broke his body, shed his blood. So far away from the breaking of bread and pouring of wine, the washing of feet, and yet so near. Like those freed from bondage in Isaiah, we leave behind a trail of death's shackles. Perhaps, we should imagine the garment of salvation, this robe of righteousness, not as silk or satin—gleaming white—but as rough and torn. God is in these broken things.

God of the fractured, you sent your son to save us. Mend our rifts with a passion to serve our neighbor, that we may exult in you with our whole being. Amen.

-John Grinvalds, Alum, 2021

GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 15

There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. Yet, O Lord, you are our Father, we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.

-Isaiah 64:7-8

In these two verses, Isaiah reminds us that it is the Lord's hand that created us. And he's right. Hands are used as a metaphor for power in the Bible, and God's power has called us into being. But sin's hand, too, is present in this passage. The chill grasp of death has grabbed onto us, too, as surely as God formed us. We cannot shake it; it will not let go, and it can only pull us into the grave. And why try to use our own hands to take hold of God? How could we? It often seems that God has hidden Godself from us and allowed us to be dragged away by sin. Isaiah is raising a good question: what force has final authority over us? Clearly we don't have that power. Is it our maker, who entered into death?

Almighty God, You formed us from breath and dirt, and you abandoned your strength to die with us and for us. It is only by your hand that we are freed from sin's power. May we find you revealed in our suffering. Amen.

-Travis Kahl, Classics and Classical Languages, 2022

HOLY SATURDAY, APRIL 16

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. -Isaiah 65:17

There is a space between promise and fulfillment, a waiting room between the "I will" and "I have" of the one making the promise. It's the kind of sterile, fluorescent-lit space where you await healing after a prolonged ailment.

Israel endured something horrific. Unfaithfulness and exile brought the nation to the point of death. Yet, through the prophet, God's treatment is announced: a novel cure. God will create everything anew. In this promise Israel finds itself a survivor living on the fault line between the sick and the well, waiting...waiting for the cure to take effect.

We inhabit such a space on this day between death and resurrection, a waiting room in-between the promise that Jesus will rise and its fulfillment. Here we cannot ignore the reality of sickness, sin, and death—it lies immediately behind us. Yet, it is here that we sit on the edge of our plastic seats, listening intently for our name to be called because we know what lies immediately before us: a whole new world.

O God, you are the source of our hope and healing. You are making all things new. Give us courage in our waiting, and renew our hope that leaning into your promise, we might rejoice in the coming dawn. Amen.

-Pr Adam White, Campus Pastor