



*"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert...a highway shall be there, and it shall be called, the Holy Way...it shall be for God's people...everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away"* (Isaiah 35).

What an incredible vision the prophet Isaiah unleashes upon us. Amid rumors of war and desolation, death and destruction, who would imagine that a poem could throw a monkey wrench into the spinning wheels of despair and death? That a poem could quench the thirst of those who are withering on dry, parched, dead land?

Some very wise scholars who are much smarter than me, tell us that this poem in Isaiah is out of place; that it's language better resembles the language found 10 chapters later. Barbara Lundblad, an ELCA pastor who retired a few years ago from teaching at Union Seminary in New York once said about this text,

"The Spirit hovered over the text and over the scribes: 'Put it here', breathed the Spirit, 'before anyone is ready. Interrupt the narrative of despair'. So here it is: a word that couldn't wait until it might make more sense."

Interrupting the narrative of despair: Now there's a mission statement for the church! Interrupting the narrative of despair, Isaiah dares to speak a word out of place. Isaiah dares to speak a word that refuses to wait until it might make more sense. Sadly, we have become so accustomed to bad news, that when Isaiah's poetry comes to us, it seems unreal, unattainable, and out of place.

Mass shootings; geo-political chaos around the world; elected leaders treasuring political power over authoritative governance; racial profiling; “caravans” and the list goes on. But this narrative of despair doesn’t just exist in the news, our own lives are overwhelmed with narratives of despair:

Awaiting test results; mourning the death of one we love; wondering if we’ll make it through the next round of layoffs; yearning for the days before our kids grew up and moved away; longing for those pre-retirement days when we felt a greater sense of purpose in our lives; we know all too well what the narrative of despair looks and feels like.

Well I am here to tell you today that right here and now, there is a word out of place. A word that dares to interrupt our lives; a word that speaks to all of us who have entered the wilderness; who dwell in the land of darkness; who wait and wait for God to come and breathe life into us.

God has a highway crew and a road has been built. A road built by God’s prophets and sealed by the cross of his Son; a road where on Sunday mornings we hear incredible words of healing: “This is my body given for you. This is my blood shed for you.” Here in this place, we find a road that leads us exiles home; not to some nostalgic place from our past, but home to God’s heart.

You whose parched hearts still break over the death of a spouse, partner, parent, or (heaven-forbid) a child and who feel like you are being swallowed up in grief – *waters shall break forth in the wilderness, streams in the desert.*

You who wander through the dark valley of depression not knowing where the pathway lies, or that there even is a pathway – *a highway shall be there; it shall be called the Holy Way.*

You who are paralyzed by fear because you can’t imagine how all the bills will get paid this month – *the lame shall leap like a deer.*

You who cannot bring yourself to speak words of forgiveness needed to heal the pain and anguish of a broken relationship – *the tongue of the speechless will sing for joy.*

You whose feet are tired and worn-out from walking on burning sands of despair and pain, take heart; for the One who interrupts our narratives of despair is here; The One who has joined us in our exile by taking our wounds with him to a cross is here – right here in our midst; whispering into our unstopped ears – “I love you with all my heart – Welcome home.”

Peace and Love,

Pastor Doug