

His Promises Are Worth The Wait
Third in a Series (Making Advent All About Jesus)
December 15, 2019
Isaiah 35:1-10
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And a highway will be there, it will be called the Way of Holiness...Only the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads, Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Dear Friends in Christ,

The goal of our December sermon series is to be making this **Advent season all about Jesus**. Two weeks ago, our sermon focused on how life is so blessed when we live at Mt. Calvary instead of Mt. Sinai, or to say it another way, how much better life is when the forgiveness of sins is ruling in our hearts instead of the demands of the law. Last week we focused on how the fruits of the Holy Spirit taste so much better than the fruits of our sinful nature, or to say it another way, to paraphrase John F. Kennedy, when we keep on asking the question “what can I do for my neighborhood” instead of “what can my neighborhood do for me?”

Two weeks ago - His Mountain is the Highest Mountain. Last week - His Fruits Are the Best Fruits. Today our sermon theme is “His Promises Are Worth the Wait.”

A couple of days ago, I received some good news that feels like bad news. The good news is that my cardiologist’s friendly pharmacist friend called me to say that I have been approved for a new drug, repatha, which promises to reduce my cholesterol and help me to live longer. The bad news is that it comes in the form of an injection that I’m supposed to give myself twice a month. You need to know I’m not a fan of needles. Not at all. I get sweaty hands and weak knees and an anxious heart just thinking about it. And the promise of a longer and happier life is one I wonder if it will ever come true.

By nature, we are impatient. I’ve never met anyone that enjoys waiting. And the longer we wait, the more we doubt if the promise will be coming true. That was true for John the Baptist in today’s Gospel, and that was true for Israel in the days of Isaiah, and it is true for all of us, by nature. Two lessons arise out of our appointed readings for the day. The first is to explore the fruits and the long term consequences of impatience, and the second is to explore the fruits and the long term blessedness of repentance.

Lesson #1 The fruits and the long term consequences of impatience include weak hands, feeble knees, and anxious hearts.

In today’s Epistle lesson, James directs us to follow the example of farmers who by definition have to be patient as they wait for the harvest to ripen. There is so much about farming that farmers do not control, and even though the temptations are there to grumble, to get crabby, to lose sleep in the night, or to use Isaiah’s language, to get feeble in the knees

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and anxious in the heart, the farmers I know, for the most part, endure the ups and downs of the weather patterns with a quiet shrug of the shoulders and a gentle, “we’ll have to wait and see how it turns out.”

In today’s Gospel lesson, John the Baptist had been predicting the Messiah would be soon coming, He would be swinging His axe of judgment, unbelievers would be swept away as the chaff blows away in the wind. And yet the news about Jesus was that He was full of Good News and miraculous healings. The blind who met up with Jesus could now see, the ears of the deaf were now hearing, the mute tongues were singing for joy, the paralyzed were running like deer. It seems as though doubts were rising up on the inside of John as he sat in prison, it seems as though his hands were getting weak, his knees feeble, and his heart anxious, and so he sends his disciples to inquire directly -are you the one who is to come, or should we expect another.

In our text for today, there was good news for Israel, but it didn’t really feel like good news. You it was good news that the desert was going to going to come to life and the wilderness was at some point in the future going to be rejoicing and full of life, but Israel wasn’t living in the desert and the wilderness in those days. The blind were going to see and the deaf were going to be hearing and the mute were going to be singing for joy, but did that really feel like good news for the folks who could already see and hear and sing? It was good news that the folks who were weak from fear and panic and terror would be strengthened, but if you were already calm, as were many of Isaiah’s listeners, this good news wasn’t really good news. And in verses 8-10, when Isaiah talks about a straight highway where captives could return from exile, that was good news, but captivity was 100 years away for the folks in Isaiah’s day.

The people of Isaiah’s day weren’t really listening to his bad news of judgment coming their way, and so the good news of return from exile wasn’t really good news. And so it is with many of us in many of our days. If we’re not paying attention to the Law of God, well then the Gospel won’t be all that sweet to our ears either. If we haven’t accepted the diagnoses that every day we sin much and deserve the wrath of a righteous God, well then the birth and the life and the suffering and the death and the resurrection won’t really be of much interest to us in this Advent season. And if that’s the case, well then it will be slim picking when it comes to the fruits of the Spirit. We will find the fruits of impatience to be rising up on the inside of us and causing all kinds of trouble in our marriages and families and circles of fruits, namely the fruits of weak hands, feeble knees, and anxious hearts, or to say it another way, crabbiness and complaining and self centeredness and the list goes on.

On the other hand, as often as the preaching and the remembering of Law is having proper effect, that often there will be confession of sins and there will be contrition and there will be

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repentance. Or to say it as Isaiah wrote, **Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.**

Which brings us to Lesson #2 this morning: **The fruits and long term blessedness of repentance include brave perseverance and compassion.** One author wrote it this way, *The Good News at Advent is that God has not taken off on a retreat but that the God who cares for the dry and barren places cares for each and all of us. God shows up even in the desert and barren places of life to await us in renewal, restoration and salvation.*

Four promises we find in our Advent Old Testament today. The first promise of God through Isaiah to hurting and discouraged people of Israel is that the day was coming when their barren wasteland would spring forth in flowers and fertility. The glory of the Lord would be revealed in abundance. Lebanon was known for its fragrant cedars, Carmel was known for its mighty oaks and Sharon was known for flowers and rich pasture. In every land such as ours where people enjoy rich farmland and fertile timberland and beautiful scenery, we have a foretaste of what is to come. In these parts, we experience a land flowing with corn and soybeans, although along with these crops comes all kinds of thistles and unseasonable weather, but in heaven we will see it with our own eyes, all of creation in perfect harmony. Friends in Christ, the promises of Jesus will be worth the wait.

A second promise of God through Isaiah is that when the Messiah comes, the people of God will have such an attitude of confidence that it will be contagious to all who spend time with us. A widow who lost her husband 20 years ago will be taking a woman recently widowed by the hand and you can hear her saying, "You can do this." A retired man who has made it through double knee surgery will be side by side with his friend at physical therapy talking smart and making it through. A friend who has long battled anxiety and depression will be giving her friend a ride to church, sitting next to her, and rejoicing in the promises of God.

A third promise of God through Isaiah is that when the Messiah came, the blind would be seeing, the deaf would be hearing, the paralyzed would be walking, the mute would be shouting, the desert sands would be a pool, and the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In Galilee and Judea, Jesus didn't heal all of the lame or the blind or the deaf or the mute, but in heaven He will. In our days, it's obvious that God hasn't taken away all of the cancer or the arthritis or the dementia, but in heaven he will. Dear friends in Christ, the promises of Jesus will be worth the wait.

A fourth promise of God through Isaiah is that there will be a highway of safety for the people of God on the way to the heavenly Jerusalem. This highway will take the redeemed right through the ravines and the valleys, there will be a beaten down path through our

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difficulties and disasters, the way will not be a walk in the park, but you will make it through.

Dear friends in Christ, whatever is making you weak in the knees, whatever is making your heart race, behold your King comes to you today. Advent begins the church calendar year, it's about Jesus the very Son of God conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary coming again and again to hold you close, to take you by the hand, to help you stand up straight, to whisper in the quiet of the night, you can do this.

Not too far away from here, there is no doubt a husband who is afraid that his wife is falling out of love with him, and not too far away from him is a middle aged woman starting down the long and winding road of chemotherapy, and not too far away from her is a stressed out single person thinking seriously about ending his life, and not too far away from that person is a single mom overwhelmed with noisy kids, a car that won't start, and a boss that will not give her a break. What they all have in common today is that they are hearing the Word of God, they are sorry for the bad they have done and the good they have failed to do, and in this very hour what Jesus Christ has accomplished on the cross is being delivered into their very souls.

The kingdom of God is like a medium sized church in a medium size city full of folks going home this very day renewed in their confidence that the promises of God will in every case be coming true. Every week they are tempted to be overwhelmed with their challenges, but as often as they enter the sanctuary and begin singing, that often gladness and joy are overtaking them, and before they know it sorrow and sighing are fleeing away. Their days turn into little Hallmark movies, every one of them has a happy ending, not because everything is going their way, but because Jesus Christ is their way, and as often as they lay their heads down on their pillows and rest in His Good News, that often their days have happy endings.