

INI

Isaiah 35,3-10

Quinquagesima — 15 February 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Old Testament lesson from the Book of Isaiah the prophet, which was read earlier:

4 Encourage the exhausted hands, and strengthen the feeble knees.
Say to those with palpitating heart,
“Take courage, fear not.
Behold, your God will come with vengeance;
The recompense of God will come,
But He will save you.” ...
And the ransomed of the LORD will return,
And come with joyful shouting to Zion,
With everlasting joy upon their heads.
They will find gladness and joy,
And sorrow and sighing will flee away.

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: Although we’ve been enjoying unseasonably warm and sunny weather, more often than not during the winter months we can experience fog – both in the City, the Bay area, and inland in the Valley. As a matter of fact, we have Botts’ dots on the highway because at times Tule Fog can be so thick that those reflective raised dots are the only thing that let drivers know where the road is or where an exit is.

But whether it is fog or just a grey day, our moods can be affected by the dullness or the brightness of the day. Often, if the weather is wintry, we look at the world through gray colored glasses. If that’s true

for our physical world and our mental state, it may also be true of our spiritual state. We may so focus on the ills of this world and the ills which we experience that we may tend to lose sight of the fact that Jesus has not only promised to be with us until the end of the age, but that He will come again to wipe away the ills and wrongs of this world and reward those who are His with life eternal.

The prophet Isaiah spoke to God's Old Testament people who were looking at their world through grey colored glasses and losing spiritual heart. So God used the prophet Isaiah to bring hope to a people whose hands needed strengthening and whose knees needed to be braced up.

This brings me to my sermon theme for today, "**Behold, Your God.**" I'll develop this theme in two parts:

- 1) He Will Create A New Earth;** and,
- 2) He Will Create A New People**

1) He Will Create A New Earth. I think that we all have this ideal that there is such a thing as "unspoiled nature." And by unspoiled, I mean untouched by human beings. Environmentalists decry the touch of human beings as if human beings are not part of nature. And more often than not, the human touch that is frowned upon is the touch by European civilization. Thus, some people have this idealized notion that the Americas were unspoiled until the white Spanish conquistadors came to spoil everything – let's ignore the fact that the Aztecs sacrificed human beings by the thousands by ripping out their hearts and using the rest of the body as a protein supplement and that the Incas were as imperialistic as any Roman ever was.

Ultimately, however, there is no such things as "unspoiled nature." What spoils nature is not the human touch – whether it is heavy handed or light handed. What spoils nature is sin. Mind you, sin is a by product of the touch of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Be that as it may, our environment, whether by humans touched or untouched, is sin-stained. As Paul said to the Romans,

For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. (Romans 8,22)

The whole world groans on account of the consequences of sin, even if untouched by humans.

As human beings, all of us are bound up to and in our world. And we are bound up with sin as well. As David said in Psalm 103:

As for man, his days are like grass;
As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.
¹⁶ When the wind has passed over it, it is no more,
And its place acknowledges it no longer. (Psalm 103,15-16)

Moses speaks similarly in Psalm 90:

You have swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep;
In the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew.
⁶ In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew;
Toward evening it fades and withers away. (Psalm 90,5-6)

There are many other similar passages in God's Word. The thrust of them is quite simple – here today, gone tomorrow. By the way, if this is true of man, it is true of our world, or nature, as well. A cynic has said that if we want to see the impact we've made, put your hand in a bucket of water and then draw it out – where is the impact or outline of the hand in the water?

But if we are tied in with our environment and our environment with us, then on the Last Day God will not only recreate us – which we'll get to – but He'll also create a new creation in which sin and its effects will have been banished. Listen to the picture language that Isaiah uses:

For waters will break forth in the wilderness
And streams in the desert.
⁷ And the scorched land will become a pool,

And the thirsty ground springs of water;
In the haunt of jackals, its resting place,
Grass becomes reeds and rushes.
No lion will be there,
Nor will any vicious beast go up on it;
These will not be found there.

Isaiah's readers knew what it was to live on the edge of a desert climate – where the absence of water was critical. Thus, it is no surprise that God should chose as a symbol of His new creation on the Last Day gushing water in the midst of a parched and arid landscape. Not only that, but the wild animals that still threatened God's people would not be banished. For us, we might not identify with wild animals but we certainly can identify with drought being turned into a blooming, life-sustained watered landscape.

What will happen on the Last Day? Peter tells us:

But the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. (2 Peter 3,10)

The world in which we now live and in which we experience at times joy but also at times sorrow, will disappear!

The new earth which God is going to make will not have any grey fog – no more white outs or Tule Fog. The world which God is going to create only has sun shine. We listen to the wonderful description given to us by John in Revelation.

As far as believers are concerned we read:

They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat;¹⁷ for the Lamb Who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from

their eyes.” (Revelation 7,16-17)

Furthermore:

And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. ⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

(Revelation 21, 3-4)

Today, all too often, we live in the midst of a spiritual grey fog – sometimes thicker but sometimes thinner – which can obscure if not hide God’s promises towards us in Christ. But as our text makes clear, the Lord is there, even if we cannot as yet see Him. But on the Last Day He will fully reveal Himself and wipe away all the vestiges of sin. In so doing,

2) He Will Create A New People. As we stand on the brink of the season of Lent we think that this gives us forty days in which to prepare for the Passion of our Lord. For the unbelieving world, the period before Lent might be a time to party – Mardi Gras, anyone? But really, for the unbelieving world the party continues after Ash Wednesday because it laughs at the notion of sin, of falling short of God’s demands for His creation.

But the last laugh will be on the unbelievers. Why is that? It is as Isaiah says,

Behold, your God will come with vengeance;
The recompense of God will come,
But He will save you.

Yes. God will come with vengeance. Our text doesn’t say much more about this judgment that will certainly come, but this is the clear teaching of Scripture.

We might ask, but isn't it also the clear teaching of Scripture that Jesus is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world? (John 1,29)

Isn't it also the clear teaching of Scripture that Jesus is not only the propitiation for our sins, but also for the sins of the world? (1 John 2,2)

Well, yes. All that is true. In fact, it is as Paul says,

God made Jesus, Who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5,21)

And again we hear from the apostle John, who says of Jesus,

For You were slain,
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. (Revelation 5,9)

There is no doubt that Jesus' sacrificial death was enough to atone for the sins of every person for all time. He has redeemed all from sin – and that includes each of us as well. That means that He has freed us from the guilt and condemnation and the lordship of sin. The writer to the Hebrews says that those who believe Christ has died and risen for them “ may receive the promise of an eternal inheritance” (Hebrews 9,15)

What does it mean to receive an inheritance? We know that in our regular world one may either accept or reject an inheritance. When it comes to the spiritual inheritance secured for us by Jesus, the situation is a bit different. As we heard last week, it is the Lord Himself Who opened our hearts to believe the promise of the Gospel and in forgiveness become an heir of Christ (Acts 16,14). The inheritance which Christ purchased with holy and innocent blood is rejected by unbelievers – while the reasons may be countless, it boils down to the fact that they don't think they need it.

But that inheritance is absolutely necessary. Before God, all of us are sinners and all of us fall short of the glory of God – some fall a little

bit short, some fall a whole lot short, but all fall short! (Romans 3,23) By nature, humanity's default setting towards God is one of hostility (Romans 5,10).

But while we were enemies, Christ died for us. He paid the price for our sins. And now, instead of standing with the ungodly, we stand with the godly.

In this world, we realize this but imperfectly. But there will come a day that is spoken of by Isaiah:

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened,
And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.
6 Then the lame will leap like a deer,
And the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. ...
And a highway will be there, a roadway,
And it will be called "The Highway of Holiness."
The unclean will not travel on it,
But it will be for him who walks that way,
And fools will not wander on it.

The first verses of our just cited were used by Jesus Himself to announce that He is God's long-promised Messiah – and His miracles were proof positive that He came to take away the effects of sin – blindness, deafness, lameness, muteness (Matthew 11,4-5). Now in part, but then, fully.

Now we wrestle with the effects of sin. We are declared forgiven, but on that Last Day that forgiveness will make all believers into a new people of God who no longer wrestle with sin, pain, tears, sorrow or sighing, or finally death. The old things are indeed passed away.

Conclusion: Spiritual fog is the norm for this world. Sometimes it's thicker. Sometimes it's thinner. But it never goes away. It is never out of season, so to speak.

But in the midst of fog, God has sent His Son with the Word of

forgiveness so that our hands might be spiritually strengthened and our knees might be spiritually braced so that we might go through this world with hope.

What is that hope? Not only that our sins have been forgiven. But more than that. In Christ, we are heirs – heirs of a coming new world, new earth, in which we shall be a new people living in that forgiveness that takes away the effects of sin.

It shall be as Isaiah says:

And the ransomed of the LORD will return,
And come with joyful shouting to Zion,
With everlasting joy upon their heads.
They will find gladness and joy,
And sorrow and sighing will flee away. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

St. Stephen Lutheran Church of the East Bay & Central Valley
21290 Birch St.
Hayward, CA 94541-1538

SDG