

## The Redemption of Grass

Sometimes the gift of God comes to us as strength in weakness -- the awareness that, underneath our own strength and competency and capability, we are fragile. We are fragile human creatures. And as much as these words can sound un-comfortable and dis-comforting, they also offer us the peace which is God's own gift to us this day. Because it is only when we become comfortable with our fragility that we allow the might of God's strength to be our redemption. We can apprehend God's strength in our weakness. And we want the redemption that God offers, not just because we wish to be "right with God," but also because God's redemption gives us the healing we need. So, this morning, we're about the business of recognizing our fragility and allowing God's power to heal us. And the messenger-angel who brings us into this story of redemption this morning is the Prophet Isaiah.

The words of the Prophet Isaiah pull us into a story that started long before us. And just hearing this tiny snippet of the story pulls us into a past that points to our future. So, this morning, we become time-travelers, rocket-packing back about 2,600 years to the Iron Age. Now 2,600 years ago seems like a long time, but the moment of Isaiah's speed comes *after* some of the most notable events of our spiritual history. You see, as long ago as 2,600 years is, it is *after* Abraham hears God's voice calling him out of Mesopotamia to travel to the land which we now know as Palestine and Israel. It is *after* Abraham negotiates with all the other tribal elders in the area to settle down in this land. The words of Isaiah come *after* Moses gets called out of Egypt to bring his people out of slavery and back into Abraham's "promised" land. It is *after* the military victories of King David – victories that seem to settle for awhile the long-running argument in Ancient Israel between the "north" and the "south" in their version of the Civil War. The Prophet Isaiah's words come *after* King David and God have an argument about whether

God needs a “house” to dwell in – David wants God to have an elaborate Temple and God frankly couldn't care less. And the prophet's words come after the Assyrians from the east have given up on terrorizing Judah for awhile.

With all this turbulence put behind them, the words of Isaiah come to the Kingdom of Judah at a time of relative prosperity and peace: King Hezekiah has achieved stability for himself and a position among the nations of the Mediterranean and the Near East. In fact, the position of Judah and King Hezekiah was so good that, if there had been cars back then, King Hezekiah would have had a Mini-Cooper, and on the back, there would have been a bumper stick that said, “Life is good.”

For life *was* good for King Hezekiah and our spiritual ancestors – but not necessarily for the reasons they thought. The average person in King Hezekiah's realm might have thought himself pretty secure: even if the average Joe or Jill didn't share King Hezekiah's wealth, they enjoyed a time of relative peace. They had been invaded by foreign empires before, but lately, they'd lived safe from harassment and threat. The pecking order was well established, the rules for how to survive in life were pretty clear. There seemed to be peace in Jerusalem. Even if Joe and Jill didn't have all they needed personally, they had only to look up to Jerusalem to be reassured that everything was o.k. They could look up to Mount Zion, the high hilltop on which Solomon had built the Temple in Jerusalem, and they could see signs of stability and prosperity, what looked like God's gift.

What they saw when they looked at the Temple was the religious symbol of yet another great civilization: a stately tall Temple, modeled on the majestic temples of Egypt, with broad beams of fine cedar, and decorated with bronze ornaments and filled with gold to remind them of

God's majesty, complete with golden altar and candlesticks. In fact, the Temple was such a regal and stately sign of their stability that they might be tempted to forget that their redemption didn't come from all this stuff, which really was just like so many props used in a local theater production. They had forgotten the true source of their security.

And so, the word of the Lord comes to them, through the words of the Prophet Isaiah, and forecasts a time when they will lose all the creature-comforts around them, and they will be left feeling fragile. Although Isaiah's prophecy looks ahead to a time when Jerusalem will be invaded and destroyed by invaders from Babylon, we ourselves can relate in our own lives to what it feels like when catastrophe comes and none of the "stuff" around us helps us to cope. We hear with our own ears, these words, which come in verses 6 and 7, just before this morning's excerpt:

“All people are grass,  
their constancy is like the flower of the field.  
The grass withers, the flower fades,  
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass ....”

Human beings are as fragile as grass. Not the kind of lush, well-anchored grass you see on the fairway. Rather, Isaiah's grass is like the grass that's more brown than green. It's the kind of scrub grass that clings to the sheared off side of a hill, as it waits for the next big rain to sweep out the earth from around it, to uproot it and carry the it off to drown in the Chesapeake Bay. As human beings, we are like scrub grass. We might fortify ourselves with the best

nutrients we can find. We might shore ourselves up with some earth to protect us, but when it comes down to it, we are fragile.

We are fragile.

... which might sound like a message of doom.

But listen to how Isaiah finishes this sentence of seeming doom:

The grass withers, the flower fades,  
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades;

But the word of our God will stand forever (7-8) ...

He gives power to the faint,

And strength to the powerless ...

Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,

They shall mount up with wings like eagles,

They shall run and not be weary,

They shall walk and not faint" (29, 31).

Notice how strength comes to us – not because of our own power, or resources, or competency or health. And don't we all know – from either our own experience or that of a family member – how quickly our good health can escape? How we feel just like that scrub grass clinging to an eroded hillside? Any strength – of body or mind – can disappear in an instant, just like a breath of wind extinguishes a candle.

So where do we look for comfort? Where do we look for security? Where can we find healing? Where can we find true peace, the peace that passes all understanding?

We find healing from our fragile human condition, when we act like the grass we are; when we glory in every day, conscious that it may be our last; when we suck up the sunshine of the moment, not worried about whether tomorrow it will rain. We find healing when, after times drought when we just can't get enough water, we allow ourselves be frail, when we let ourselves be freed from our anchor of earth, allow the brittle straw of who we are to be lifted up on the wind of God's breath. We are healed when we allow God's breath – the same breath that spoke us into Creation – to carry us up to soaring heights, just like the wind lifts up the eagle's wings. We are healed when we stop grasping onto the earth that has been our grounding-place, when we let ourselves fly on the breath of God.