

7th Sunday after Pentecost

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Isaiah 66:10-14: The Perfect Antidote For Pessimism

St. Matthew's

Oconomowoc

When we have a whole long run of bad things happening to us we can begin to show some of the early signs of depression. We can wear a sad look on our face. We have little or no good things to say to anyone. We cast a shadow of doom and gloom wherever we go. We're just plain bad company. People begin asking us: Are you feeling all right? Others begin to remark about what a pessimist we have become.

The prophet Isaiah who was sent by God to the kingdom of Judah in the last half of the 8th century B.C. had every reason to be a man overwhelmed by feelings of pessimism. As a young man, he had watched the Assyrians march the people of Israel (the kingdom to the north) into exile. A few years later he saw the northern capital of Samaria fall. Then the Assyrians struck at Isaiah's southern kingdom of Judah. Many of its walled cities were destroyed. Thousands of captives were taken. For most of his days Isaiah faced wars, rumors of war and stinging defeat.

Isaiah also had days when he had the good Word of God to share, and no one wanted to hear it. As Isaiah looked around at his world he saw not only war, but idolatry and profaning of the Sabbath, and gluttony and greed, and gross injustice.

But instead of pessimism, Isaiah is able to maintain an amazing optimism. He holds out to us the **PERFECT ANTIDOTE FOR PESSIMISM**. No escaping from reality. No burying of the head in the sand. And no shaky reliance on self, and in our own ability to pull ourselves up by the bootstraps. What's Isaiah's secret? Listen carefully because it's an amazing insight into life and how to cope with it. We're talking here about a man whose life ended according to legend by his being fastened between two planks and being sawed in half, and yet his writing reflects an enduring mood of optimism. Let's take a look at his words in his 66th chapter, verses 10-14.

First of all, notice that verses 10 and 11 are not addressed to an individual but to a group. The phrase "**all you**" turns up twice in those verses. "**We have reason to have hope because we are not alone.**" We have reason to have hope because we are part of a people -- God's people, people who share Spirit-guided attitudes. There are many others who feel the same way we do about things. We are not alone in wanting to hear less bad news from those talking heads on television. We are not alone in longing for a return to a more moral attitude in society.

You know, one of the best moves you can make if your outlook begins to turn sour and pessimistic is to find a friend, especially one who shares your faith. When you put God's people together and they talk with one another, they share with one another a genuine love of good, and a hatred for bad, and a strong desire for goodness to prevail over the bad. And when things fall short, when bad does in fact triumph over good, there's the wonderful, comforting assurance of forgiveness and healing in a loving Savior from any and all forms of bad and sin. That's a community, a body of God's people that offers some genuine and solid support for hope.

I'd like to think of our congregation as being an example of this principle at work. You might be here today having just run into that proverbial brick wall. You know that you can't handle it alone. But believe me, there are people here in this congregation, good people of God, who have already been there. They've already faced what you're facing. And they have an incredible strength to share with you as together you face your brick wall, and consider it, and share the good news of the gospel together.

Isaiah invites us to consider that we have reason to hope **because God has invested himself in us**. The Bible lists literally hundreds of the promises of God. The very best and the most comforting of those promises are the ones that talk about a Messiah coming to die on a cross. But are literally hundreds of other promises of God that speak about other things. And those hundreds of promises are not just thrown to the wind. They are made to you, and they are intended for your benefit. I think sometimes we can be a people prone to pessimism, simply because we are

not close enough to God and his Word to really be able to internalize and take to heart the hundreds of promises he makes to us. I am appalled by the absoluteness godlessness of this society that surrounds us. But, even in that, there's reason for hope, because I know that one of the promises of God is that finally the day will come when the forces of evil and godlessness will not prevail. God will ultimately prevail in the end. He promises us that.

To immerse ourselves in those promises that give every reason for optimism, each one of us has to sit down and decide how we are going to go about the task of reading our Bibles. If is going to be privately, by ourselves, then what is our plan? If it going to be with others, in groups, then when?

That's important for all of us. And there's so much there. You read the creation story, the history of the flood, the exodus from Egypt, the period of the judges, the united and divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the promises of the prophets, and you see over and again God investing all that time and energy in you.

Then you watch him send His Son as one of you. You see him live perfectly with beauty and compassion. You read his teachings and the record of his miracles. You watch the conflict develop between Jesus and the religious leaders of his day. You watch him suffer, die and rise again. You read the gospel, not just as *his* story, but as *your* story.

Isaiah's words this morning are just part of that whole stream of scriptural promise, offering over and over again a comforting word of peace. No matter what is going on in the world around you, or in your personal life, you become convinced and comforted in the wonderful truth that God has cared and God does care about you. Think of it – God has loved you more than he loved the blood of his holy, precious Son Jesus. If you can read the Bible in this way - as the Lord's promises and actions on your behalf, you will always have reason for hope. You mean that much to God!

Did you catch how Isaiah presents a God who cares for us with the tender compassion of a mother for her children? Need

anything more be said? That's a beautiful image and comparison. Don't ever lose sight of it. It's the **PERFECT ANTIDOTE FOR PESSIMISM.**

Finally, Isaiah himself makes us a promise in verse 14. He says: "**When you see this, your heart will rejoice.**" Isaiah never lost his vision of the final outcome of history. In fact, he was able to look over the horizon of history and see a new heaven and a new earth. That is surely is a wonderful way to look at the story of life. That's how Isaiah once again gives us **A PERFECT ANTI-DOTE FOR PESSIMISM.** He says; "Look to the end of things." You know how history ends. It ends with God triumphant, with Christ returning in glory, and with you crowned with eternal life -- an eternal life that is already yours through faith in Jesus Christ. It is a good ending, a great, glad final scene as the curtain comes down on the drama of the ages.

Knowing how it all ends makes even your bad days good. Each day, headlines and all, the 5:30 evening news included, each day, and every day is a day of getting ready for the happy ending. For Isaiah there was always time for celebration, even on his bad days, because he kept the big picture, the whole story, in perspective.

May it go that way for you too the next day the kids are absolutely unbearable, and the next day when you're late in leaving for work and you find that the car battery is dead, and the next day when you have an angry argument with your spouse, and any other day in life when the bad things happen.

Amen.