

“Hope: The Promise of Reversal” Isaiah 35:1-10 Matthew 24:36-44 December 1, 2013

The boy went to see his grandmother in the nursing home. It was upsetting, for as he walked down the hall, there were people who looked forlorn, some reaching out to him, some calling for their mothers, some staring vacantly.... The smell was hard for him to take. He wanted to run the other way, but even more, he wanted to see his grandmother.

Finally he arrived at her room. She had been in the hospital with a stroke, and now was trying to get well enough to go home. When he walked in, her eyes lit up! One side of her body had been badly weakened, and her mouth was a little out of balance, but otherwise she looked like Grandma. “Jim!” she exclaimed as he entered. He was so relieved that she did not look like some of those other patients he had walked past. She held out one hand, and they hugged.

As she always did, Grandma seemed to understand. She looked him in the eyes and said, “Jim, you’ve just walked past folks who are waiting for the Promise of the Lord! Until then, things are tough. But I want you to always remember, no matter what, that God’s promises are good! When you get home, I want you to get your Bible out and read Isaiah 35! Will you do that? And next time you come, will you bring me my Bible?”

Isaiah 35. It’s a good one to know, whether you’re walking down the corridor of a nursing home visitor or have just been admitted to one as a patient. It gives hope when your life feels dried up and without much purpose, or when you have lost a job. It’s helpful for those who have lost someone to death, divorce, or break-up... It speaks hope to parents whose kids seem unable to find any real traction in life.

Whatever is pressing the life and hope out of you, God is working to save you. As we heard from Matthew’s gospel (Matthew 24:36-44), God’s work will come just when we don’t expect it, just when it seems impossible....so we need to be ready, ready to hold onto the promises and to watch for the Savior - the saving action of God - to be involved in our lives. The promise is that God can make our desert blossom and lead us through whatever renders us weak and discouraged, all the way to a place of everlasting joy.

To some, this may sound like a Disney ending to a harsh tale, perhaps wishful thinking... Woody has always enjoyed the saying, “Life’s tough, and then you die!” But according to God’s Word, the saying should be, “Life’s tough, and then you LIVE!” This is not fantasy, but faith in God, and we are invited and challenged to stake our lives on it.

We have hope, because the God who first brought forth Creation out of nothing, who called light out of darkness and life out of dust, has called us precious children, so precious that God came in human form, giving up all power to be a helpless child in the midst of a harsh and cold world. God came, lived among us in Jesus, taught us what life is supposed to be, and then showed us the power of forgiveness and love in the face of hatred, betrayal, and death. In Jesus, God defeated death, ALL death, all darkness, and brought forth the possibility of forgiveness and life for us all.

The desert shall rejoice and blossom...and the weak hands will become strong, just as those whose knees are feeble will find new footing. Our fear will go out the window, because we will realize, just at the place where we can't sleep at night, that God is holding us in God's loving and everlasting arms, and that God really is at work to save us!

The reversals will be amazing: Folks who have been blind will become able to see, 20/20! And those who could not hear will become able to distinguish tonalities and rejoice over the beauty of music. No more wheelchairs or walkers or even canes! Legs will become strong and supple! And even those who have never been able to express themselves will be able to sing for joy!

Let us look at the deserts of our lives and see what has dried us out and taken the joy from us.

Let us offer the circumstance, this desert, our places of hopelessness, to God. We may, not because we can fix the situation, but because God specializes in bringing life and offering hope just where it seems to be impossible.

In Jesus Christ, the ransom has already been paid, for each one of us. So hear this as Christ's gift to YOU: "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return...with singing...they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (Is. 35:10)

Watch and see how this can be so, as the Savior works in your life this Advent season. And may the hope and glory of the Lord shine upon us and through us all. Amen.