

17th Sunday after Pentecost
September 16, 2018

Hymns	225, 453, 376, 323
First Lesson	Isaiah 50:4-10
Psalm	116 (page 107)
Second Lesson	James 2:1-5, 8-10, 14-18
Gospel Lesson	Mark 8:27-35

Isaiah 50:4-10
God's Greatest Gifts Are Good News for Gloomy Days
I. The unflinching Savior
II. An unfailing faith

Memorial Ev. Lutheran Church - Williamston, Michigan

In the name of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, fellow sinners washed completely and perfectly by His blood,

Continuing conflicts in politics here and rising unease about situations overseas. Devastation from flooding in the Carolinas and expectation of fewer crops here due to a dry summer. With shorter daylight and a wet winter forecast, the gloomy weather might match the gloomy news.

In this lesson the setting was just the opposite. Jews in 700 BC disregarded Isaiah's warnings about coming disaster. God's chosen nation still had a vibrant economy, a decent army, a strong government. "Disaster, Isaiah? No way! Things are going great!" But God was using His faithful prophet to prepare Israel for being overrun by enemy armies and being hauled off to exile. And both of those happened not long after Isaiah.

They happened not because God had taken back His promises to His chosen people. Nor did they happen because God was powerless to stop invading pagans. Right before this lesson God said, **"Because of your sins you will be sold; because of your transgressions** (Isaiah 50:2) you will be sent away." The guilt of Israel, especially divorcing herself from a monogamous spiritual relationship with **"the LORD God"** (v. 4) and prostituting herself to idols, would cause the troubles. Would God's **"arm be too short to ransom"** (Isaiah 50:2) His chosen people? No! Even when gloom and doom enveloped Israel, God had good news for them: His greatest gifts to them would remain the prized possessions of His faithful people.

God's message is the same for us. He knows how cold and wet the weather here will get the next six months. He knows exactly how low national politics and international distrust will sink. He knows our health and wealth problems, school and employment issues. He knows all the gloomy clouds hanging over us. What God wants *us* to know is that we are still the most blessed people in the world. How? God's greatest gifts were for Israel and Isaiah, are for you and me, good news for gloomy days: the unflinching Savior and an unfailing faith.

I

What should God's long, strong arm do to help Israel most? The chosen nation would be torn away from the promised land. So, God should use His long, strong arm to bring them back? Would it be right for

the promised Savior to come from Israel, yet be born in a foreign land? God determined that the Savior would be born in the promised land, so He would lead Israel back from exile. Great news! A great gift!

But Israel's exile, as bad as it would be, was only a symptom of a far greater problem. Sin separates souls from God. If left unatoned, sins would land every sinner in the world in everlasting hell. So the greatest gift from God for Israel and for the world would be to deliver Israel and the world. That rescue wouldn't be as neat as a good guy riding on a majestic horse to capture the enemy quickly. It would involve a terrible price, far worse than any other price ever demanded or paid in history.

The LORD didn't ask for volunteers. Only One was qualified to carry out the mission successfully – the One who is both the Almighty Lord and true man to be mankind's Substitute, the One who is the Servant of **“the LORD God”**, the Son of God, God Himself, Jesus Christ. Here, *He* is the **“Me”** (v. 4) and the **I”** (v. 5). Jesus was speaking through Isaiah seven hundred years before He was born of Mary.

Most Jews still today understand these verses to be an expression of their race's mistreatment by the world, and their resilience to endure it. But compare these words with what is said about the **“servant”** (Isaiah 42:1) of the LORD here with what happened to Jesus of Nazareth as told us in the New Testament. Is there any doubt about who is speaking and what He is saying? Like some other chapters of Isaiah and dozens of other chapters in the Old Testament, this is a prophecy *of* the coming Savior spoken *by* the coming Savior through His called, chosen prophet!

In the gloomy days ahead for Israel, in our gloomy days, good news – great news! – remained theirs and remains ours in God's greatest Gift, the unflinching Savior. He stepped forward to say, “I accept the mission for which I alone am qualified and on which the world needs Me to succeed completely!”

He has **“an instructed tongue, so I know how to sustain the weary with a word”** (v. 4). As we heard in today's Gospel Lesson, Jesus taught in great detail about His mission to rescue the world from slavery to sin and Satan. We need such divine lessons to see Jesus as the One who predicted the predicament into which He would step, then see it all happen just as He said it would. That proves He is the Savior.

“The LORD God opened My ear, and I Myself was not rebellious” (v. 5). An ancient custom directed a servant who was happy working on his master's estate to ask the master to put the servant's ear lobe up against a doorframe and pierce it with an awl; the opening in the ear would be a sign the servant was committed to his master and willingly worked for him. In the most committed acts ever, Jesus left heaven willingly to serve His Father, willingly and obediently drank every drop of suffering involved in the eternal rescue mission to save the world.

“I submitted My back to those who beat Me, and My cheeks to those who pulled out My beard. I did not hide My face from disgrace and spit...I have made My face hard like flint” (vv. 6-7). We know the suffering and disgrace heaped on Jesus as He carried out our rescue. Unflinching, resolute, determined, He endured it all to rescue all.

What did you picture when we read, **“Who can accuse Me? Let us take our stand. Who can pass judgment on Me? Let him approach Me...Who...can declare Me guilty?...All of them will wear out like a garment”** (vv. 8-9). Yes! The Jews disagreeing with Christ's teaching! The church leaders condemning Jesus to die in their crooked Maundy Thursday night and Good Friday morning trials! The enemies of Jesus telling lies about Him so they could get their way and have Him killed! But who won? **“Christ Jesus, who died and, more than that, was raised to life, is the One who is at God's right hand and who is also interceding for us”** (Romans 8:34)!

God's greatest gift to Israel wasn't the land flowing with milk and honey. It was the blood flowing from the hands and feet and side of the One who would come from Israel and for the world. God's greatest gift to us isn't enough money to pay the bills. It is the priceless sacrifice of Jesus for us and for the world. Thanks to our unflinching Savior who paid the staggering price, no one can condemn us – not even Satan! We wash in Christ's precious blood that covers us. Thanks to Jesus, no one can separate us from God now or ever! We treasure His saving work as our greatest gift today, tomorrow, forever.

II

Last week's September 11th anniversary led some to ask again, "Why does God allow so much trouble in the world?" An answer is, "To keep us from getting too attached to *this* life in *this* world." Israel in Isaiah's day was too attached to *this* life, and – because they saw little need for God – had forsaken Him. The looming defeat and exile would be a wake-up call to return to the LORD. Modern ills are our wake-up call to return to Him. Even in gloomy days, God's greatest gifts are good news, including His gift of an unfailing faith in Him and in His work!

Those "**who trust in the name of the LORD, and lean on... God**" (v. 10) show their trust and reliance by "**worshipping the LORD**" (v. 10). Be careful! Worship of the LORD isn't confined to an hour of an order of service in the house of the Lord. "**Worship**" of the LORD involves every second of our lives as we show Him our deepest love for rescuing us. We show that by living according to His every desire and will and command.

That's not a pastor's sneaky strategy to get people to obey. That's the Savior's unchanging Word. He who "**worships the LORD**" does so as he also "**listens to the voice of God's Servant**" (v. 10), the Savior. We are all ears and heart when He speaks from His Word; we clear our schedule to sit at His feet at home during the week, and in His house the first morning of the week. We are all ears and heart to do His bidding as we live a daily "Thank You, Jesus, for delivering me from the hell I so surely deserve!" That's not the way my sinful flesh wants me to live. But that is the way the Spirit of God moves me to live. By the message about Jesus, by the sacrifice He made, we live the life that puts God-given, unfailing faith in Jesus into practice each day.

She who so worships the LORD each day shows it in the way she "**walks**" (v. 10). God sets the contrast here between walking "**in darkness**" and in "**bright light**" (v. 10). When we choose to walk in the darkness of sin, to follow the shady ways of temptation, we stray from Him who is "**the Light of the World**" (John 8:12). God shines His saving Light in our hearts by giving us faith in His Son, our unflinching Savior. Let's not turn that Light off for anything!

When troubles blow into our lives the clouds of doubt about how much God loves us, we keep turning to and turning on "**the Light**", Jesus. Sicknesses and sorrows, financial setbacks and family issues, bad days – even bad *years*! – are all put in their place by God's great gift of an unfailing faith in Jesus. Unfailing not because of how we believe, but because of the work of the God in whom we trust! Nothing can separate us from Him!

Only someone out of touch with reality would say these days, "There are no problems in front of us, nor do I see any on the horizon!" We all have questions and concerns, challenges and stresses that press down on us. But even in the most gloomy days – *especially* in the gloomy days!, God's greatest gifts remain. God's greatest gifts "**sustain**" (v 4) us who are "**weary**" (v. 4). God's greatest gifts to us are the Savior and an unfailing faith to trust Him. Amen.