



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
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November 16, 2008
3rd Sunday of End Time
Isaiah 52:1-6
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 52:1-6
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 84
Second Lesson: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13

Stand Firm in Your Trust in God

He is the highest authority
He is the ultimate source of help

Have you ever known anyone that has a hard time waking up, I mean beyond your average teenager who can't get out of bed unless they are dragged? Do you know people that just have a hard time waking up? I've met one person like this in my life. He was the vicar right before me the year I went to vicar; you vicar during your third year at the seminary. You spend a whole year in a congregation. The guy that was there the year before me had alarm clocks he would spread throughout his apartment, and they wouldn't wake him up. He had people calling him to wake him up. He slept through church once or twice, something like that I think. When I got there, I knew he had those problems waking up, so I always got to church before the janitor did on Sunday morning so that I wouldn't end up being late. That's the only guy I met that had that kind of problem. I've always wondered why someone, after watching some of you, hasn't just made an alarm clock that instead of ringing just says "Amen," because people seem to pop right up.

Sometimes if we forget to set an alarm clock, we don't wake up. Even though it's not a problem we have, we just sleep through things, right? Sometimes we just forget to do that and then we have those kinds of problems. This morning our God is speaking to us about being asleep and waking up, and he's not talking about alarm clocks or any of that stuff. He's talking about the tendency that we have as we live our lives in this world, the tendency of both his people in the Kingdom of Judah and us, to at times become spiritually asleep. And he talks to us in view of his return how important it is that we wake up. Wake up and look at the splendor of what he has done. Wake up and rejoice in the splendor of what is to come. That's really what he wants us to focus on, but we've got to realize the tendency that we have to spiritually fall asleep.

The words of the prophet here are speaking to God's people. The context in which they are written is really kind of interesting. Isaiah was a prophet who lived shortly before the Babylonians came and carried off the Kingdom of Judah to Babylon to the Babylonian captivity. He wrote in his first 39 chapters words of warning, calling God's people to repentance with words of threat. "This is what God is going to do if you don't turn back to him. You are going to be carried off into captivity." He wrote that before it happened.

Then in Chapter 40 and following in the rest of his book, he writes to those who have been carried off into captivity—those generations that were going to live away from Jerusalem. And he writes to them words of comfort, words of God's peace. Remember, he's writing this before they have even been carried off.

So in what we read from Chapter 52, he's speaking to God's people, the generations that are yet to come that are going to be living in exile. And as they live in exile, you can imagine how it became kind of easy to become spiritually asleep. God let them be carried off because they didn't repent. You would think that would lead to an earnest repentance. But after generation after generation after generation is born in captivity, you can see how they would say, "I think God's forgotten us. I think God isn't going to take us back. Everything's the same. We wake up and we are still in this foreign country. We still do these things every day. We go to bed and get up and it's the same way."

You can see how they might have fallen asleep and started to blend in with the people they were living with and start worshipping some of the Babylonian gods so they didn't stick out so much. Spiritual sleep, doubting that God was there, probably came over them and they needed God to come and throw that bucket of water on them and say, "Wake up, because here is what I am going to do. Wake up, because the day is coming when the uncircumcised and the defiled are not going to enter Jerusalem anymore." He is talking about the day that is going to come when his people will not be threatened by people in this world.

How's that going to happen? Did you notice he says to them, "Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, O Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains on your neck, O captive Daughter of Zion." If they could have done that, they would have done it already, right? He's telling them to do these things, but really he's saying he is going to do it for them. He says, "Without money, you were carried off. You were carried off because you turned away from me, and I sent the Babylonians to discipline you. But now, without money, you are going to return. You're not going to do anything to pay for what you have done. You are not going to do anything to free yourselves. I am going to do it all. And when that day happens, then people are going to say it is I who foretold it." It is the Lord, and his name will no longer be blasphemed. People will call on his name with rejoicing.

That's what God is talking about in all these verses that we read from Isaiah. The splendor of what he had done and the splendor of what was to come is what he wanted his people to focus on.

But what does that mean for you and me? You and I haven't been carried off into a foreign strange land, at least not most of you. We don't have the same kind of captivity to a foreign power that the Israelites had, but we have been captive by sin. And we live in a world that is still ruined by sin and because of that, there are times when you and I are tempted to fall spiritually asleep. And just like those people of God's kingdom that said God doesn't know what's going on, he says to them, "I know what's going on. I've

seen what Egypt did. I've seen that Syria has oppressed you. And now what do I have here? The Babylonians have come and oppressed you, but I'm going to take care of it."

As you and I go through our daily lives, we don't always see just how captive you and I have been to sin. We are so surrounded by it that we don't think of it as being that terrible at times. We use God's name not to pray, praise and give thanks. We use God's name day by day to express our frustration, our anger and our bitterness about something. It's the name by which we are saved and yet we use Jesus Christ to express the fact that a quarterback threw an interception or we hit our thumb with a hammer. Not exactly equivalence. We are caught up in our sin.

But not only that, as we live in a sinful world, there are times when we see things go on in the world around us and we say, "God, are you even aware of what's going on?" Or God let something happen in our personal lives that the devil uses to make us question whether God really loves us. If he loved you, would he have let this sickness happen? Would he have allowed you to lose this loved one? Would he allow you to lose a job or face this financial trouble? The devil tries to get you to believe that God doesn't love you.

Or we can get so busy chasing after these things, the things of this world—chasing after wealth, finding our comfort in wealth and our confidence in wealth. We forget about God and he gets choked out of our lives. So our God comes down and looks at us at times and says, "What do I have here? You are spiritually asleep."

So sometimes, these things that Satan wants to use to tell us that God doesn't love us, God allows into our lives so that we wake up and see that this world is not our final destiny. We are surrounded by sin. We are surrounded by our own sin. And God at times uses the things that happen in a sinful world to lead us to really sit up, take notice and evaluate what truly is important.

You and I face a lot of things that are hard. Our God wants us to know that he comes down and he says, "What do I have here" at each one of them. He knows what we are going through. And he tells us to come to him in those times. He wants us to find in him our comfort and our strength, to find in him our victory because of the splendor of what he has done. And what he has done is undeniable.

We just saw it happen through water and the word this morning, right? It doesn't always appear to be much, but in that water and that word, God works forgiveness of sins, gives the gift of faith, even to someone as tiny as Elizabeth, a week old. That's what our God does.

So certain is his love for us that he baptized us into Christ's life and his death and his resurrection, so that he tells us the sinful nature in us has been put to death through the life and work of Christ. Our sins have been forgiven, and now he tells us to rise up and live in that newness of life. The certainty of what he has done for us is there when we

come to his altar and in, with and under the bread and the wine, he gives us the forgiveness of sins because he lived and he died in our place.

Again, it's without cost, without money—he does it all! So as we face those lousy, rotten things that happen in this world, those things that cause us at times to say, “God, are you still there?” God tells us to flee back to the certainty that we are saints triumphant. Our sins have been taken away, not because of us, not because we've decided to be good or because we do good, but because God's goodness goes far beyond all of our imagining. God's goodness goes beyond the things that are terrible in this world. God's goodness and his love and mercy go beyond our wickedness, rebellion and sin.

The certainty is there. We are saints triumphant. We don't see it yet. We don't see it completely. But that day is coming when we will be gathered before our Lord, the sheep on the right and the goats on the left, the believers, the unbelievers, and all those people that have gone before us, the saints triumphant, we will see them. And it will be evident to everyone, all generations, that God has kept his word that heaven belongs to those who live in faith that Jesus has taken away their sins.

This is the glory of what he has done, and this is the splendor of what is to come.