

Greetings from God our Father and from Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and from the Holy Spirit. Amen

The Promise: A New Heart now – A New World, New Life to come

Isaiah 35:1-10

One of the interesting by-products of the war in Iraq has been film and news footage of the barren landscape there. While there are small splashes of green here and there, the country is mostly desert. Only along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers does a patch of suitable soil for growing crops hug the shoreline. Iraq is a dry, desolate wilderness. But that is not how it always was. The Bible tells us that the Tigris and Euphrates once flowed out of the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:10–14). Our best guess is that Paradise once flourished where Iraq is now on the map. Adam and Eve, of course, were driven out of the Garden because of their sin. And maybe the last remnants of the Garden was wiped off the face of the earth in the great flood. Desert landscape sprawls across the Middle East as a reminder that it is not the way it is supposed to be, for sin has corrupted the earth and all that is found upon the earth.

Isaiah foresaw that Judah would go into exile (by the Babylonian Empire) because of their sins and turning away from God. The Israelites and people of Judah kept worshiping false gods instead of Yahweh. God warned his people of their sins through the prophets, but the people rejected the word of other prophets and Isaiah. Babylon destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC to punish Judah for her sins (39:6). The destruction of Jerusalem was violent and overwhelming. Their lives became like a desert (dry land parches without water, living water). It is not the way it is supposed to be, for sin has ruled their lives.

This is not how our world is supposed to be. Sin is present and powerful. Pollution, the extinction of species, natural disasters are indications of a world in decay. Disabilities such as blindness, deafness, and birth defects affect the quality of life for many. Terrible diseases such as cancer and HIV/AIDS are further indication of a fallen world. Our modern “civilizations” are violent and self-indulgent, preferring the gods of pleasure and power to the peace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. The creation is subject to uselessness and decay because of our sin (Rom 8:20). Humanity was banished from God’s presence because of sin. Man lost his perfect relationship with God because of sin.

And we as wayward children choose many times the dry desert over green pastures and blossoms, for our sinful flesh wants to do what it thinks is good, right, beneficial, and pleasing for ourselves rather than obeying the Lord, doing what is God pleasing.

God promised to restore Judah. That promised was fulfilled in Christ Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem we celebrate at Christmas time. God has reconciled the world to Himself. God provides forgiveness of sins out of grace. Isaiah's prophecy paints a beautiful picture out of the dry land, the desert (verses 1-7). The wilderness and wasteland will burst into blossoms and rejoicing, and streams of water and new growth. A land that was once dead is alive again by God's hand and His grace. **AND** the blind would see, the deaf would hear, the lame would leap, and the mute would sing. All these promises were fulfilled in Christ coming. John the Baptist asked Jesus if He was the promised Messiah or should they look to someone else. And Jesus answered John the Baptist this way, ***Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by Me.***" (Matt 11:4-6). The Good News to

the poor in heart is announcing forgiveness of sins to the repentant heart. The Good News is Christ has come to be the ransom for all sins of the world. Christ being our ransom, can and does announce the forgiveness of sins to you and me when we confess our sins that we have allowed to rule our hearts and minds.

God would come to save and avenge his people (vv 3–4). That happened when Jesus suffered the wrath and punishment of God on the cross for all the sins of his enemies—including the sins of his own people! Whereas He formerly cast them out of His presence because of sin – as He did in the Garden – now He would come in strength to take away their fears. Christ builds this highway to heaven to Himself by His Grace and Mercy / by the way of the Cross/ the shedding of Christ's Blood/ Christ is our ransom and so Christ is the Way and is the Highway itself. The exiles (formally you and I) would return to Zion on the Way of Holiness (v 8). No one unclean (no unrepentant sinner) would return on the road. You and I were set upon this highway by God's hand of grace and mercy and forgiveness of sins. We begin our journey upon this highway of holiness in our Holy Baptism and we are kept on this highway by God's hand and power, by His means of grace, His Word, Confession and Absolution and

the Sacraments. We do not stay on this highway by our efforts or strength. For when we try by our own efforts, we have sinned. We have tried to be saved by our own means, not by Christ, we have sinned and have failed – and fallen off the path altogether. So we do need Christ continually to come and bring His forgiveness and strength to us each Sunday by His Word and Sacraments. For only those forgiven by God, the “redeemed” and “ransomed” of “The Lord”—those redeemed by Jesus’ cross—would return to the Promised Land, the heavenly kingdom.

In the final Advent, the second coming of Christ, God will bring about renewal of our world. When Jesus returns on the Last Day, God will make a new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1–2). Jesus is “making all things new” (Rev 21:5). The creation itself waits with eagerness longing and the groaning in birth pains (Rom 8:19, 22). A river of life will spring forth from the throne of the Lamb—just like in the Garden of Eden! And just as the wilderness blossomed and bloomed in Isaiah 35, so the tree of life will be in the new heaven and new earth (Rev 22:1–3). This new life is already breaking into our present age. By the life-giving waters of Holy Baptism God is turning us into new men and women, forgiven and redeemed by the blood of Jesus (Rom 6:3–4). The Saint part in us is living

already in the 8th day, eternal life. When Christ comes again, all who believe in Christ, our bodies are turned from perishable into imperishable bodies, where there will be no more death, disease, or pain. No longer will we be banished from God's presence because of sin. Christ our Lamb, the sacrifice for the sins of the world, will be with us and wipe every tear from our eyes (Rev 7:17). There will be nothing "unclean" in the new heaven and new earth—only sinners forgiven and redeemed by the blood of Jesus (Rev 21:27). We will enter the heavenly Jerusalem and walk the streets of gold. Christians from all nations will enter the city whose gates are never shut (Rev 21:21–27). The desert restored, the world renewed, a new paradise, a new eternal Life with Christ!

And may the peace of God, which is beyond all human comprehension, keep your hearts and minds through your faith in Christ Jesus. Amen