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Midweek Advent III
18 December 2013
Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Isaiah 35:1-10

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

It's especially hard in the winter.
The sun doesn't shine all that long.
It's cold and no one really wants to go outside.
The warm bed sounds much better than facing the world.
Let's hit snooze just one more time.

Winter depression is a burden for many.
And for others, it's not limited to the winter.
Our world can be harsh, no sympathy, no bending, just a hard, cold reality.
In many ways it's a wilderness, a desert,
 full of mourning and sighing,
 marked by weakness and suffering—
 it often seems we travel a lonely way.

All your attempts to fix this lonely way have either led you deeper into your fear and depression,
 or have given you a false hope and only a temporary comfort.

The path we take and chose for ourselves is full of self-inflicted bumps and detours.
Though blind, we claim to see; though deaf to the Lord's word, we think we have understanding.
We run off with the jackals and the hyenas,
 starving ourselves from the pure and refreshing Word of our Lord.
The hate within our hearts, the regrets, the way we can't even talk to our spouses—
 that's the lonely road we walk.

Until the Lord's Word breaks in.
Until Isaiah the preacher of the Gospel of Christ comes and promises hope.

*“Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who have an anxious heart,
 ‘Be strong; fear not!’
Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God.
He will come and save you.”* (Isa 35:3-4)

Be strong; fear not.

That's not a command to buck up, pull it together, get it right!
In fact, it's just the opposite.
Rather than requiring something from you—
 rather than telling you to lift yourself from the loneliness of your sin—
 the Lord, here, delivers strength and removes fear, simply by His Word.

His Word does what it says.
It delivers what it demands.

By His Word we receive strength.
By His Word fear is cast aside.

And it's not because His Word provides the proper steps to take in order to change our situation.
It's because His Word is a promise:

"Behold, your God will come...He will come and save you." (Isa 35:4)

The promise is that our enemies will be destroyed.
And the greatest enemies are those of the flesh:
our laziness and anger,
our deep-seated hatred—even for our families and those closest to us,
our inability to pick ourselves up, to dust ourselves off, and get back on the right track.

Our enemy is this sinful flesh that lulls us to sleep:
either in its laziness toward doing good to the neighbor,
or in its unwillingness to fight the sin that keeps creeping in.

This sinful enemy will give us any excuse not to read and study the Scriptures.
It will tell us that we're too tired to pray,
too busy to sing the Psalms,
too disinterested to learn more and ask more.

Satan wants you as far removed from the Heavenly Father as possible.
And the best way to do that is to cut you off from His word.
To remove that source of comfort and life and strength.
To starve you from the Holy Spirit; to cut you off from the Son Himself.
He wants you away from the Church, away from Bible Study, away from prayer and devotion.
He wants you to walk the lonely way—either in pride or despair—Satan's not picky.

That's why you need this Word.
You need the preaching of Isaiah, and it's fulfillment in Christ.
You need vengeance upon your enemies, which is the cross of Christ.

There, hanging on a couple planks of wood, the enemy is defeated once and for all.
Though he once overcame man by a tree; now he is overcome by the tree of the cross.
There, in the body of Jesus, sin hangs—crucified and judged.
St. Paul says to the Corinthians,
*"For our sake he made Him to be sin who knew no sin,
so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."* (1 Cor 5:21)

In Christ the sin of the world is judged and paid for.
The enemy of our flesh is destroyed.
That's the recompense of God.

And at the resurrection, death is swallowed up in victory.
And everything is turned on its head.

In Christ, the blind see and the deaf hear;
 the lame leap like a deer and the mute sing for joy.
 The wilderness and desert are full of water,
 and the burning sand becomes a summertime pool.

In Christ, the lonely have a family and the forsaken are brought near.
 The depressed find joy and those who would end their lives rejoice to live forever.
 Those with guilty consciences, bearing the shame and guilt of a life of poor decisions,
 are free and able to live in peace.

All of that is *in Christ*: the promise, the reality, the hope, the joy.

And you are in Christ.

Right now, it certainly doesn't seem that way.
 You still feel your depression and your loneliness.
 You still struggle to find joy and happiness.
 Your anger gets the best of you and you're still not sure whether Bible study is worth it.
 It's still hard to talk with your wife or tell someone you're hurting.
 Everything still seems to be the lonely way.

And yet what Christ has spoken is true.
 All is finished.
 The victory is won.
 The path you are on is called "*The Way of Holiness.*"
 And while you still veer to the left and the right, the Lord brings you back.

He strengthens your weak hands and makes firm your feeble knees—
 He gives you all that you need for the journey and promises never to leave you.

You're on your way back to Zion, back to the Lord Himself.
 He is gathering you into His kingdom—
 even though it doesn't always seem that way.

Isaiah describes our hope, even in the midst of our suffering:
*"And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing;
 everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
 they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."* (35:10)

What was the lonely way has become the highway of joy and gladness—the way of Christ.
 And though it seems hardly different, the reality is that everything is flipped on its head.

The Lord is with you and your enemy is defeated.
 Your sighing is but for a moment, but joy comes in the morning.
 You are in Christ, and in Him, you have everything.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit