

August 16, 2020

Isaiah 49:14-16:

“Engraved”

- I. The Roiling Slush of History.
- II. The Cry of God's People.
- III. Engraved.

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Isaiah 49:14-16

Dear Friends in Christ,

Henry Lyte has been described as a conservative Anglican minister. He wrote the hymn "Abide With Me", which will serve as our post sermon hymn. Lyte spent much of his 54 years in this world suffering from various respiratory illnesses. He died in 1847. His daughter wrote that though very ill, he preached his last sermon, and "In the evening of the same day he placed in the hands of a near and dear relative the little hymn, 'Abide With Me...'. The hymn was sung for the first time at Lyte's funeral. The words of the 4th stanza are simple, yet powerful and unwanted words for those who have nothing more than this world.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories
pass away; Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not,
abide with me.

Amazing, isn't it, how hard we work to get comfortable and settled here only to have our moments of comfort and settling torn to pieces by....you name it. Without the Lord, change and decay are the only certainties of life. We are to be comforted and settled by what it means to be

ENGRAVED

I. The Roiling Slush of History.

I've sub-titled this part of the sermon, "The Roiling Slush of History". Roiling is defined as "to stir up: disturb, disorder, rile." It is used to describe moving in a violent and confused way.

Prior to the Great Flood, we're told: "The Lord saw the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." ...Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence." (Gen. 6:5 & 11) The corruption refers to wickedness in every compartment of life. The violence is self explanatory. And it all speaks to this day.

After the Flood we're told, "The Lord said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth.'" (Gen. 8:21b) This takes place some 3500 years before Christ. And with that in mind, when Jesus walked the earth he stated, "...what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander." (Matt 15:18-19) The Holy Spirit would later have the Apostle Paul quote the following verses from Psalms 14 and 53: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." (Rom. 3:10-12)

So, based on everything I just put in front of us, tell me: How close has humanity ever come to resolving its corruption and violence? How close?? How could any Christian live with the delusion that humankind will solve its problems? Christ said - well, you know what He said - "And because lawlessness will be increased (increased!), the love of many will grow cold" (Matt. 24:12) And this: "And this gospel will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations (not that all nations will even remotely be won over to the Gospel, but it will be proclaimed as a testimony!), and then the end will come." (Matt. 24:14)

Listen. It's the roiling slush of history; the constant moving in a violent and confused way! And the remnant church has made its journey through this from the beginning to this moment. The church has been and will remain, until the very end, an object of scorn and disgust - something that must be eradicated - because, if it stays faithful to the Word, it will be a constant and driving reminder to this world of its sin, shame, death and hell! You know what Jesus said: "... (the world) hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil." (Jn. 7:7) And this: "if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you." (Jn. 15:18)

II. The Cry of God's People.

And so, we come to the Cry of God's people: "But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.'" (v. 14) Well, the Lord did say, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace." (Jn. 16:33a) That is to say, we will always have God's love and presence in the Means of Grace; forgiveness of every sin, and the assurance of everlasting life. In that same verse Jesus went on to say, "In the world you will have tribulation. (Jn. 16:33b) That is, tribulation because we are connected to Christ; the One the world hates.

You'll recall that the sermon hymn for this morning was "The Church's One Foundation." Please recall these words from the third stanza: "Though with a scornful wonder The world sees her oppressed, By schisms rent asunder, By heresies distressed, Yet saints their watch are keeping; Their cry goes up, 'How long'? And soon the night of weeping Shall be the morn of song."

It's so easy to dance between the two, don't you think? First, "The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me." Secondly, "(the) cry goes up, 'How long'?" And with that, much of the church offers nothing more than delusion to its followers and spiritual paralysis to Jesus' words:

"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace (that is, peace to know God's love, presence, forgiveness and assurance of everlasting joy). In the world you will have tribulation (if we're faithful to God's Word). (Jn. 16:33)

Paul and Barnabas echoed Jesus' words: "...through many hardships we must enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22b)

We have those moments, don't we - moments of wondering if God is there? Does He understand what I'm feeling; my fears and frustrations? Have you ever cried within, "Does He still love me? Have I gone too far? Crossed the line?" Has it ever come down to, "I don't think I can take this, anymore?" It's the words of our text: "The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me." And the Lord responds . . .

III. Engraved.

"Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have you engraved on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me." (vv. 15-16)

Engraved! He holds us in a way in which we become part of Him. His love and compassion go immeasurably beyond the most tender and sacrificial love known to this world; the love of a mother for her child. And yet as God states and time has shown, "Even these may forget." He does not!

And get this: "your walls are continually before me." We're constantly there. He holds us, sees us, cares for us. It has been observed:

Those things that his people experience are not hidden from God's attention and care. When God's people complain that the Lord has forgotten or forsaken them, he assures them. How could he ever forget his people if they are engraved on the palms of his hands? What a wonderful picture of God's constant attention to the affairs of his people!...We need to mark well how the love of God for us burns in his heart. (John A. Braum, *ISAIAH 2*,

Peoples Bible Commentary, CPH, St. Louis, 2005, p. 182)

And James Hewett recalled the following:

Martin Luther had a dream in which he stood on the day of judgment before God Himself - and Satan was there to accuse him. When Satan opened his book full of accusations, he pointed to transgression after transgression of which Luther was guilty. As the proceedings went on, Luther's heart sunk to despair. Then he remembered the cross of Christ - and turning upon Satan he said, "There is one entry which you have not made, Satan!" The Devil retorted, "What is that?" And Luther answered, "It is this - the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sins." (James S. Hewett, "Illustrations Unlimited," Tyndale Publishing House, Wheaton, Il., pp. 67-68)

Though life's journey might have its high moments, it is largely filled with mundane and some very hard times. I'll say it again and again: If all we have are the hopes and dreams, the labor and sacrificing for the wants and do's of this world...well...we have nothing. Not really. Not in the long stretch of life.

Thankfully, the love of God in Christ is ours. The nails that held Jesus to the cross engraved your name and my name in His palms. We hear Him say, "Because I live, you also will live." (Jn. 14:19) We are engraved! Forever!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott