

"Good News for Bruised Reeds and Smoking Flax"

Isaiah 42:1-7

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

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Arise, shine, for your Light has come; and the Glory of the Lord has risen upon you! Amen.

Dear children of God upon whom the Light of the world has risen,

Often the many troubles and tribulations faced by us during the course of life on this earth leave us hurting and heartbroken. A downcast countenance and a spirit cause many to close their eyes and weep. They are like a cornstalk or a stalk of grain, in the midst of life, suddenly blown over by the winds of this world - a bruised teenager who asks, "Why is there so much hurt in a boy-girl relationship?" So they close their weeping eyes and they hurt. The elderly, as physical strength recedes, feel the heavy burdens of past days and their dark sins. So they close their hurting, weeping eyes and they ache. Parents and spouses are hit with tragedy and they search their souls for the answer to the question that God has not promised to answer.

The troubles of this life are many and varied. Children, youth, adults, and elderly experience them and are not immune from the events that cause us to hurt physically, emotionally, mentally, and even spiritually. We run through the scenarios time and again, and then once more in an attempt to change the past or form the future. We wonder about ourselves and we wonder about God. "Are you there God? Are you here God? Do you care? Am I still a Christian? Do I have any faith left. My faith in God feels about as strong as a bent-over, broken down reed and about as alive as a barely smoking, smoldering wick on a candle. I need to know You love me, God, but in my smoldering, bruised condition, I'm almost afraid to hear what You have to say."

O dear people of the Lord God, please listen to His Word from the Old Testament reading for this day and you will hear ...

... Good News for Bruised Reeds and Smoking Flax!

Behold! My Servant Whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands shall wait for His law." Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, Who gives breath to the people on it, And spirit to those who walk on it: "I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles, To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, Those who sit in darkness from the prison house.

Thus far the inspired and inerrant Word of the Lord our God.

In eternity the Divine Council made its decision and decreed what must be done in, with, and for this earth. The Lord God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, elected the One to go the fallen world. The eternal Son of God, begotten of the Father from eternity, would be the Servant. He is the Elect One sent on the mission. From His eternal and everlasting throne, from the splendor of Paradise where there is no hint of darkness, no inkling of sin - from the place where perfect righteousness, holiness, and justice prevailed without exception - from the abode of God where nothing or no one with any sin could ever be - from that perfect place, the Son would come.

And, He did, - God with us. And the Lord said to Moses, *"Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground."* Moreover He said, *"I am the God of your father -- the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."* And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God (Exodus 3). The Holy Spirit writes the Words of the Father to us through the prophet, informing us, *Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.*

Justice to the Gentiles! -perfect justice to you! -holy justice to me! O dear God, we are but bruised reeds and smoking flax. Do You want us to measure up, to stand in, and to be weighed within the telltale scales of Your divine justice? *And the LORD said to Moses: "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat" (Leviticus 16).* There in the temple He comes and no one can enter the Holy of Holies with any sins clinging to him or her. One day Isaiah is in the temple, stands in dread, and cries out, *"Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6).*

The Lord is coming and He will neither remain in nor reside in the temple. He is not controllable like those other gods - like the shrines of Diana fashioned by the dirty hands of silver smiths, or like Moroni created by the darkened mind of another smith. *He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.* The words give the impression of a machine without emotion or compassion, a divine engine come to consume what is not holy and right and perfect and good. Indeed, we might ask, *when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18).* Actually, we make it rather personal and wonder, "Will He really find faith in my soul?"

A great and terrible day arrives when the Lord God leaves the temple and continues His journey to come to us. Incarnate by the Holy Ghost, He travels the few inches before implanting Himself upon the uterine wall of a Jewish virgin. When He does, bruised reeds all over the world discover that the Lord our God is not only holy, righteous, just, and perfect, but He is also gracious, loving, kind, and merciful. Like Jonah, the Lord resides for a time in the belly of one of His creatures, and endures the stressful, difficult, jostling journey to Bethlehem. When He does, smoldering wicks across the land learn the Good News that *the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1).*

Still the Servant Whom the Father loves continues in His mission. The toddler is whisked off to Egypt before one of Herod's henchmen is able to slay Him. He follows His foster father to Galilee and grows up with His half-brothers and half-sisters. A dozen years after His immaculate Conception and wonderful Birth, He returns to the temple. In grace and mercy, He questions and

answers the rabbis. In love and kindness, He answers the question of His mother, *Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business? (Luke 2).*

Still He comes. Two decades later, He walks across a small section on the face of this earth. His cousin sees Him and points His people to Jesus, *Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world (John 1).* God startles us as we begin to realize that He has not come to render judgment but to become subject to His own Law, doing so for our sakes. *When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Galatians 4).*

Startling. Bewildering. This God, Who is so holy and just and righteous and perfect, has come to us, not exacting His due, but as the humblest of servants. We know how John felt that day when *Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3).* The righteousness that God demands of us, He showers down upon us. The faith that God requires of us, He gives to us.

Dear people, behold your God! He stands in the waters of the Jordan for you. In His Baptism, He sanctifies the river so that wherever earthly water is used in the Name of the Triune God the baptismal blessings which Christ Jesus earned for us are bestowed on us. *For the promise is to you and to your children (Acts 2).*

When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him (Matthew 3). Not in condemning judgment but in divine grace, God is saying Good News to bruised reeds, *Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.*

Jesus came to people who were hurting and struggling. He bound up the broken-hearted, giving them that peace which the world can not give. He released people from the bondage to sin and released them from prisons of their own making. He gave speech to some and sight to others. *Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, Who gives breath to the people on it, And spirit to those who walk on it: "I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand." It is no wonder that as Jesus came up from the water a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3).*

The Son of God continued in His mission. He journeyed to Jerusalem, eating the New Passover with His disciples, washing their feet, sweating Blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, and enduring the ridicule, mocking, beatings, torture, and trials of man. He bore the burden of a cross beam through the streets of Jerusalem, doing so without raising an angry voice. So now, we can understand what Isaiah meant when he wrote the Word of the Lord, *He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.*

The Son of the Lord God Almighty, in passive obedience to His Father, permitted Himself to be crucified. He bore the burden of the full Law of God and the complete divine reaction to sin as He suffered and died on Calvary's awful tree. So now, we can understand what Isaiah meant when he

wrote the Word of the Lord, *He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. ... He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged.*

Still He continued. So important was this Servant's mission that neither death nor hell nor Satan nor the hordes of hell nor the tomb nor the door stone nor the seals nor the guards *nor principalities nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing (Romans 8)* could prevent the Lord God Almighty from completing His work for you.

He through hell in order to earn the right for you to be in heaven. You may feel like a bruised reed all bent over and that your faith is barely alive. Perhaps your spiritual well-being has undergone a severe assault and you think your faith is in shambles because it appears to be only a smoldering puff of smoke. Indeed, it may be, but dear people, do not think for a single moment that the Lord has any desire whatsoever to destroy your faith. He is not going to pull out a divine weed-eater and eliminate those of weak faith. He's not about to throw a bucket of holy water on a candle wick that is barely smoldering. Indeed, *a bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench.*

There is *Good News for Bruised Reeds and Smoking Flax!* First, you are to apply that soothing balm to your own souls this day. Second, you become the beloved servant sent forth from the House of the Lord. You are to leave this holy place, go out those doors and share it with others that you meet. Truly there are people you know who are hurting and asking the same questions that you have asked and we have heard God answered today. They are your friends and neighbors and they often sit in the darkness of despair and wonder if there is any good news from God for them to believe and hold onto. I simply encourage you to invite them to come to Bible class and worship with you. Invite them to come and then bring them with you.

Behold! My Servant Whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands shall wait for His law." Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, Who gives breath to the people on it, And spirit to those who walk on it: "I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles, To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, Those who sit in darkness from the prison house. Amen.