Sermon copyright © 2013 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

Pentecost 15C
Peace, Seattle
August 18, 2013
Isaiah 5, Psalm 80, Hebrews 11

THE FINAL TRAJECTORY

There's something in the tone of voice of the readings from Isaiah 5 and Psalm 80 that sounds awfully familiar, no?

Both texts speak to the anguish of unfulfilled expectations in a relationship from an opposite points of view.

In Isaiah, we hear God intone a song (think Country Western…) of a Vinegrower—committed, loving, responsible, true, who does everything a person could possibly do to establish a vineyard and bring it to harvest.

- The location is great, the soil is fertile, the vines are choice, and the care lavished on them prodigious;
- but instead of plump, sweet grapes the vineyard yields wild, bitter fruit.

And then the mask comes off:

AND NOW, INHABITANTS OF JERUSALEM AND PEOPLE OF JUDAH,
JUDGE BETWEEN ME AND MY VINEYARD.
WHAT MORE WAS THERE TO DO THAN WHAT I'D ALREADY DONE?

And we watch what began as a love song turn into a lament and, finally, morph into accusation, hostility, and outright condemnation. A sad story. A tragic story.

Enter Psalm 80, which—did you notice?—covers the same ground from the other side of the relationship—instead of hearing it from God's point of view we hear it from the vine's perspective.

Here, too, the psalmist sings of God's providential care, and a promising beginning…

YOU BROUGHT A VINE OUT OF EGYPT.
YOU CLEARED THE GROUND FOR IT; IT TOOK ROOT AND FILLED THE LAND.
YOU STRETCHED OUT IS TENDRILS TO THE SEA AND ITS BRANCHES TO THE RIVER.

But it also ends with a heart wrenching accusation and a plea not to be for forgotten.

WHY HAVE YOU BROKEN DOWN ITS WALL SO THAT ALL WHO PASS BY PLUCK ITS GRAPES?
TURN NOW, O GOD OF HOSTS, BEHOLD AND TEND THIS VINE;
PRESERVE WHAT YOUR RIGHT HAND HAS PLANTED.

So, who is right and who is wrong?

What amazes me about the Biblical narrative is: there's room for both perspectives.
Neither side is censored. Neither side is declared "right" at the expense of the other.

Each speaks to the anguish of unfulfilled expectations in a relationship from a different point of view.

And any one of us who is a spouse or parent, daughter or son, has known or will know that pain.

Sermon copyright © 2013 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

You've done all you could do; you've said all you could say; you've invested all you could possibly invest, and the result is not what you hoped for, not what you…expected. At times like these there is often no answer to satisfy the WHY we carry inside of ourselves.

Circumstances sometimes crush us, and there is no explanation.[1]
All we can do is join the Psalmist's plaintive plea,
RESTORE US, LORD, LET YOUR FACE SHINE UPON US AND WE SHALL BE SAVED!

Life is complicated. But that's not the hardest thing, for me, about these two texts this morning. The hardest thing, for me, is the way Isaiah ends:

- with walls broken down & all care withdrawn, leaving the vineyard utterly desolate.
- Leading us to the conclusion that God could actually give up on us and walk away.

This is where the Lutheran principle of SCRIPTURE INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE comes into play.

Most often, when were confronted with a text like this, we look to the gospel reading to provide GOOD NEWS, but that's not happening today, as Jesus gives wanna-be followers a heavy dose of tough medicine about the steep cost of discipleship.

Enter the letter to the Hebrews, in which we hear how one generation after another has clung to faith in the face of unbelievable adversity.

Torture, flogging, chains and imprisonment is part of the story of faith—says the author of Hebrews—it can't be denied—but it's not the core of the story. The core of the story, the core confession, is that in spite of all this there is a trajectory, a destiny toward which this salvation story is moving and it doesn't end in death or destitution, it ends in LIFE!

When we can't see the forest for the trees, when we're trapped within the thicket of circumstances that dominate our lives and call our future into question, yet are we summoned to place our trust in the One who owns the future.

Our viewpoint is limited. But there are moments when the fog lifts and suddenly we have a view—a glimpse—toward that "better country" to which Christ, in his faithfulness to us—is leading.
That's where Hebrews takes us this morning.

Hebrews lays before us the sweeping history of God's beleaguered people who through the ages, and in spite of pain and suffering from violence of every imaginable kind, kept putting their trust in the Author of life, reminding us that whatever we might face in our lives of faith, we are not alone.

For faith, filtered through the lives of that great cloud of witnesses, allows us to see beyond the circumstances dominating our lives or our communities at that given moment, and it says IN THEE WILL I YET TRUST…

It was this kind of trusting that became the spiritual core of the civil rights movement and led Martin Luther King, Jr, 50 years ago this month, to stand before hundreds of thousands of fellow citizens and declare: I HAVE A DREAM OF A BETTER COUNTRY.

[1] Stacy Simpson Duke, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 3.* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 2010) p. 342.

Sermon copyright © 2013 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

Brothers and Sisters, whatever you may be facing today…whatever circumstance, challenge or crisis may be brewing in your life, know that when the Spirit called on you to WADE IN THE WATERS, and put her indelible mark on you…that larger story, that heavenward trajectory became your own.

We are woven into the fabric of that story, and we follow in the footsteps of that great cloud of witnesses who—though unsure of what the future held for them—chose to trust God anyway.[2]

The final testimony of Scripture is that the story of God's people does not end in abandonment and death. It ends in resurrection. Amen.

[2] FW 352