

We are about to enter the season of Lent. It is a somber season. We have already stopped singing the hymns of praise and the Gloria in Excelsis and the Gospel responses and the Hallelujah's and all of those happy sounding bits of the liturgy during the pre-lenten season. We stop to re-enforce the somber, penitential nature of the season of lent. The colors on the Altar are purple. You might think it is pretty, but it is for the purpose of repentance. We will talk a lot about sin in the coming weeks. Lent formally starts on Wednesday, and it will continue until Easter.

The reason we do all of that is to take some time to consider carefully how great our need for a Savior is, and how deep and dark and deadly our sins are, so that when Easter comes, we can sing our “Hosanna's” with true joy and faith and understanding. This morning is the final Sunday before Lent. It is the final “brace yourselves” Sunday. And what is the message God would have you hear on this day? It is the message of the two truths of our Old Testament text. Our theme this morning is, Two Truths.

The two truths are:

1. The Lord is coming to deal with all that is wrong
2. The Lord is coming to save you

When you read our text, it sounds uplifting. It speaks of encouragement and strengthening and comfort. It all sounds so

positive until you realize that the text is speaking about exhaustion, being feeble, and being terrified. While the command is to encourage and comfort and proclaim these glad tidings, the need for God to give that command means something about where the people of God are going to be taken by their Lord.

The first truth is that God is going to deal with all that is wrong. That is the meaning of the passage, “Behold, your God will come with vengeance; the recompense of God will come.” God is going to deal with all the evil ones of this age. That is not simply an eschatological statement – which means that what God is promising is not all going to happen after Judgment day. God is going to come with vengeance even now. He will punish wickedness and destroy the evil and unrighteous. Sometimes He uses political turmoil. Sometimes it is the collapse of economies or giant corporations. Sometimes He will use evil men, like terrorists, and sometimes He uses natural forces, like fires and floods, droughts and blizzards and the like. We may often be caught up in the turmoil and pains that His dealings cause. God does that for a number of reasons – many of which I cannot unravel, but some seem pretty clear. He leaves us in the disaster area to bring His comfort and hope to those who need it, to offer the salvation of our God to those who do not know it, and to be the salt and light of the Lord even among those who despise us for our confidence, hope, and security. But in the

course of events, we will be bruised. We will be exhausted by the things we are given to do and to endure as God’s faithful people. Some of us will become discouraged at times. Some of us may be frightened by the anger of the world, or the depth of the sufferings we witness, or endure. God, speaking through the prophet, commands His spokesmen to encourage and strengthen and comfort His people by His Word, because they are going to need it.

“But He will save you.” That is the second truth. He will save you. It is the same sort of encouragement that God gives in Psalm 91, the Psalm remembered in the lovely choral piece, "On Eagles Wings." “You will not be afraid of the terror by night, Or of the arrow that flies by day; Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon. A thousand may fall at your side, And ten thousand at your right hand; But it shall not approach you. You will only look on with your eyes, And see the recompense of the wicked.” You will see it all, but God will be with you to preserve you and bring you through it all and save you. When life changes and becomes difficult, and world events throw all of your familiar certainties into confusion, God is still with you, and He will save you!

As we look forward to Lent, we can see that it will be tempting to think, when things go badly for us, that God has abandoned us, or that we are finally receiving what we deserve for our sins. That is a false

temptation, however. It is sure to come to some of us, however, and so God tells us to encourage the exhausted and strengthen the feeble and say “take courage!” God will save you. In fact, He already has! He has sent His Son to take your place and pay the penalty you owe for sin. That is why we can face the troubles of life and the horrors we will witness without losing hope. God has already taken the greatest danger out of the way. The willingness of God to do that much for you proves His love! Thus we may boldly believe and confidently assert that nothing in this life can truly hurt us, and that everything comes to us by the hand of our loving heavenly Father.

That doesn't mean that it won't hurt for a while. It will. But the troubles and the pains are for good purposes. God is working in you, and through you He is working in or on others. Some of what we will experience is for discipline – things done and things to be endured that we may learn something important. Other trials are tests to prove to you how God is with you, how strong your faith can be, or what trust in the Lord really means. Faith is never built on good times – it is forged in the foundry of trouble and proved in the furnace of affliction. The true witness of the church (other than simply preaching the Word of God) is the witness of the people of God in tribulation and hardship, as they bear up and continue to pray, praise, and give thanks. The ancients used to say that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church.

They said that because when people who were frightened and insecure saw others who had even greater reasons for fear and despair holding their heads high and praising God and trusting in Him, why, they wanted to know what it was that they knew, and who it was that they trusted. People who have trouble finding something to live for are drawn to others who not only have something to live for but something or someone worth dying for!

Those are our Two Truths. And they are true also for eternity. That day of recompense and vengeance is really coming for those who reject God. They will suffer an eternity of pain and sorrow and bitter regret because they have turned away from life and chosen death. But He will save you. On that day, He will raise your tired bodies, tired no more. We will see “them” go – and we will know that it is both right and good. Then we shall join our Lord in the new heavens and new earth prepared for those who have loved Him. We will live and love and work and play and whatever God has planned for us – right now we only know that it will be good beyond my ability to imagine or describe.

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. These lines of our text speak about the joy and the transformation from sin and death to life and health and all that God has promised, and has won for us through Jesus Christ. It is

“Two Truths” Isaiah 35:3-7 Quinquagesima 2022

already ours. But it is like that inheritance which you own, but cannot take possession of until the appointed hour.

These are the two truths with which we arm ourselves for Lent. God is going to deal with all that is wrong or evil, and He is going to save us. The coming weeks will focus on sin and repentance. Don't deny it. Don't try to avoid it. Look honestly at yourself, measure yourself against God's will. And repent, then prepare throughout the Lenten Season to celebrate the great joy of our salvation on Easter.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen