

ISAIAH 42:14-21
GOD HAS HAD ENOUGH!

As our reading begins it sounds like God is about to throw a temper tantrum. He sounds like an angry parent who has had enough with the misbehaviour of His child. He describes Himself like a pregnant woman who is about to burst and cannot hold in how He feels any longer. This is the anger of God that Luther feared, that many Christians fear, and many other people ignore. But that's why He's angry. People don't understand Him. People are ignoring Him, and God says that He will be silent no more.

How do you react to God's anger and displeasure? Just think of where we stop in this reading, with God saying that for His righteousness sake He is going to magnify His Law. It will be glorious! Do you want to live under more laws, stricter laws, and with harsher punishments? No one really wants that. Do you dismiss this as a temper tantrum with God saying that He's going to level mountains and dry up vegetation and rivers? Not many farmers and those who rely on the food from their crops would like it if God did that.

How do we respond to such words? The Church thinks we should ponder them. They are part of our readings. Sure, it's nicer to go back to the beginning of the chapter and stop before our reading. The beginning is all about the coming of Jesus and how He will bring justice to the nations. God is all excited about that. He's telling you before this happens. He's like someone giving you a Christmas present, urging you to open it and then telling you what it is before you open it because He can't hold back His excitement.

Then He tells the people to sing a new song. Sing for joy. Give glory to God. Declare His praise. Then He turns to those who have turned against Him, or away from and Him and calls them His foes. He has had enough with those who are not sharing in His joy over His Christmas present of Jesus. And thus begins our reading.

Where do you find yourself? Are you sharing in God's joy over Jesus, or do you tell God that you'll open your Christmas present later, when you get around to it, when you feel like it, when it's convenient for you?

God is like a pregnant woman ready to deliver the child she has nurtured for nine months, or more realistically, for about three thousand years. And people were not rejoicing at His birth announcement. "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law" – Galatians 4(:4). There's that Law again, but where does it get magnified? Not on us. It gets magnified on Jesus. On Jesus it becomes glorious, because Jesus fulfills the Law for us. We only break the Law, and Jesus dies to pay the penalty for us. That is the glorious spotlight that God wants you to see.

God calls people who don't see Jesus for who He is blind. They follow false gods, false guides in this world and don't really know God's ways. God tells us in Proverbs to "trust in the Lord with all our heart, and not to lean on our own understanding. In all our ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight our paths" (3:5-6). Yet, even though the way to following God is straight before us, we're blinded by our sins, and we wander and stumble about through life, sometimes following God, and most other times following the ways of this world.

So, God says that He will lead us. He will guide us. He will take us by the hand away from our false gods to the real God who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it (v. 5). When you see God for who He is, your life giving God you'll follow Him. When you see God for who the world wants you to see Him as, an angry, wrathful, hateful god you won't follow Him.

However, we still need to see God's anger in our reading. God doesn't like it when we place other things before Him in our lives. If God was first in our lives all of our members would be here every Sunday. But most of us forsake our God from week to week. Yet God tells us that "a bruised reed He will not break, and a faintly burning wick He will not quench (v. 3). When your faith is weak and you're not rejoicing with God over Jesus your Saviour, God will take you by the hand because God sees you as a blind person who needs to be led back to Him.

Now if you really are following other gods such worship practices will only bring shame upon your head. You'll be humiliated and humbled before God Almighty for worshipping your false gods. Your false gods don't have to be carved idols or metal images, but they can be your own inclinations, intuitions and thoughts. Even though we know that our thoughts are tainted by sin we're good at justifying our thoughts. We're easily convinced that we're right about everything. The worst false guide in this world is our own sinful corrupt heart. Jeremiah said that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (7:9).

Yet, if you're just lost and can't find Jesus, He'll find you. God is your true guide. He guides you through His Word and with His Word. God's Holy Word is our one reliable source that will never mislead us and so we are to return to the Holy Scriptures daily over and over again to guide us.

Sure, beginning our reading where it does is unpleasant. There's much in God's Word that is unpleasant to hear, and some even consider it to be hate speech, but it can only be seen that way if it's read in isolation and not in its context and entirety.

What good is it to hear that God is guiding us if we don't first hear that on our own we have inclinations to follow false gods, and that we're blind to seeing that we're actually following false gods, and we're deaf to hearing God's Word that tells us that we follow false gods. That God will guide us, that He will turn darkness into light is a nice comforting sentimental message. However, telling you that God will guide you away from your false gods to see Jesus, that He will turn the darkness of your sins into the light of His forgiveness, is a more meaningful message, even if it does offend you by telling you that you live a sinful life by following other gods when you should be in church worshiping the Lord your God.

If you had cancer, what would you rather hear from your doctor? Would you like to be told that all is well with your health? Or would you like to be told about the cancer and the treatment, and the time you have left so that you can use that time well? When there's something wrong with our lives the loving thing is to be told about that wrong thing and how it can be fixed. The unloving thing is to hide what is wrong from the other person.

So where is God guiding you with His light? The simple answer is found in the Gospel of John. These things "are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (20:31).

God guides you to Jesus, the Light of the Word. Along the way in life Jesus may guide you to places that are uncomfortable. He will show you the Law. Just because Jesus fulfilled the Law for you and forgives your sins that doesn't mean that you can ignore the Law and sin all you want.

Yet, now when you try to honour God's ways and fail you know that you're forgiven, and in that way the Law is no longer a burden to you. Jesus will lead you away from false gods that you thought were good guides, and so yes He'll lead you away from some of your fun, but then you'll have more fun in heaven and none in hell. Jesus will lead you away from the ways of the people and to the ways of God.

Jesus will lead you to the cross asking you to deny your desires, and to give sacrificially of yourself to others. He will lead you past the cross and to the empty tomb telling you that you who are baptized are baptized into His death, and just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father we too will walk in a new life. Jesus will lead you through His resurrection to your resurrection and life to come. He will lead you to have hope that He'll return someday and make all things new. When that will be we don't know, but just like Israelites had to wait for about three thousand years for God to give birth and send Jesus, we too might have to wait for another three thousand years for Jesus to return, which for God is only three days, and so we pray to stay faithful, joyful and prepared for the return of Jesus. Amen.