

Monday, April 7th--Isaiah 61:1-9

61 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,

2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,

3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,

the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.

They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the LORD
for the display of his splendor.

4 They will rebuild the ancient ruins
and restore the places long devastated;
they will renew the ruined cities
that have been devastated for generations.

5 Strangers will shepherd your flocks;
foreigners will work your fields and vineyards.

6 And you will be called priests of the LORD,
you will be named ministers of our God.

You will feed on the wealth of nations,
and in their riches you will boast.

7 Instead of your shame

you will receive a double portion,

and instead of disgrace

you will rejoice in your inheritance.

And so you will inherit a double portion in your land,

and everlasting joy will be yours.

8 “For I, the LORD, love justice;

I hate robbery and wrongdoing.

In my faithfulness I will reward my people

and make an everlasting covenant with them.

9 Their descendants will be known among the nations

and their offspring among the peoples.

All who see them will acknowledge

that they are a people the LORD has blessed.”

Points of Interest:

Jesus Reference of the Day--*proclaiming God's news to the poor*

In Luke's telling of Jesus' story (Luke 4:16-21), the first seven lines of this passage are Jesus' first public words (Jesus stops at 'year of the Lord's favor,' cutting out the reference to vengeance). Jesus takes this passage as a mission statement or a job description. In the most direct connection yet between Jesus and Isaiah's Servant figure, Jesus says, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,' or, in other words, 'This passage is about me.'

Theology of the Day--*Anointing of the Spirit*

A handful of times now, Isaiah has talked about God's Spirit being 'on' someone, and here it's paired with being 'anointed' by the Lord. Anointing is sort of like having a police badge or lieutenant's bars pinned on. In an anointing ceremony, someone in authority like a priest or prophet would pour oil over a person's head to authorize them to fill an office or take on a task. Israel and Judah's priests, prophets, and kings were inaugurated by anointing.

Here, the Servant is being anointed, not by a priest but by God, and not with oil but with God's very essence--the spirit of God. The Servant is being commissioned directly by God, and not just commissioned but empowered. Whereas oil merely has symbolic value, God's Spirit invests the Servant with ability to match his authority. The Hebrew word for *spirit* is related to 'breath.' Perhaps because of this there's a particularly strong association between the Spirit's anointing and

an ability to speak words from God; thus in 59:21 we have the Spirit--God's breath, as it were--putting God's words on the lips of the Servant (I think) and his heirs.

Here, the anointing of the Spirit indeed gives the Servant the ability to speak encouraging words to the poor. The Spirit goes beyond that, also giving the Servant the ability to make those words come true. I suppose that shouldn't be a surprise. The Spirit's presence makes the Servant's words like God's: there's little difference between the word and the act.

Image of the Day--*Trading ashes for a beautiful crown*

Ashes were in Isaiah's time and place part of the normal equipment for mourning, and we all know that a tiara is part of the normal equipment for feeling like a princess--or a prince, I suppose. The Servant has the power to completely turn around someone's mood, look, and entire experience of life. They go into the dressing room wearing ashes, grief, and despair; they come out looking beautiful, joyful, and full of praise.

Question of the Day--*Who are these God-blessed people?*

Who exactly is the object of all of the Servant's positive attention? In verse 3 they're called 'Zion,' and in verse 8, 'my people'; in verse 1, though, they're 'the poor,' 'the brokenhearted,' and people who have otherwise had a hard lot in life.

Up until now, Isaiah has used Zion and 'my people' to refer either to the original 12 tribes of Israel or to former strangers who have adopted into a renewed and enlarged Zion through their trust in God and right treatment of others. Is one of those groups somehow the same thing as 'the poor,' or are we getting a new definition of God's people here? And if God is redefining God's people as 'the poor,' does it include anyone who happens to be poor, or is it only people who are poor or abused for God's or righteousness' sake?

I wonder if the common thread is that God likes the underdog. God originally struck up a friendship with Abraham and Sarah when they were just an elderly, childless couple who didn't seem to be going much of anywhere in life (51:1-2). The Israelites caught God's eye when they were enslaved in Egypt and bullied by Assyria (52:4). God decides to make Jerusalem the home base for New Zion because it's a ruined and empty city (49:19). The eunuchs and foreigners get God's attention when the original people of Israel seem to have a leg up because they are more familiar with God's house (56:3). And, of course, the Servant is God's favorite at least partly because he didn't seem all that special (53:2).

Time after time, God has lent a little weight to whomever is at a disadvantage. God reminds me of a coach watching a youth soccer scrimmage. When the score gets too lopsided, God joins in on the side of the losing team.

I wonder if that's why humility (57:15) is so important to God. Humility is like the minimum entrance requirement to underdog status. Maybe your circumstances aren't entirely dire; but if you have a tendency to be overlooked, or even if you bear yourself meekly, it at least gains you a second look from God.

Taking it Home:

For you: I like that God has such exorbitantly good news and hope for those down and out. However, I tend to read this passage and think 'oh God cares for *those* people. That's nice'. I never stop to think, that maybe I'm one of them. Or at least not that far from them? Reread the first several verses of the passage. Picture that God is talking to you when he says there is freedom, joy, beauty, comfort, and GOOD NEWS. Take some time to listen to what God's good news is for you today.

Tuesday, April 8th--Isaiah 61:10-62:5

10 I delight greatly in the LORD;

my soul rejoices in my God.

For he has clothed me with garments of salvation

and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,

as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,

and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

11 For as the soil makes the sprout come up

and a garden causes seeds to grow,

so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness

and praise spring up before all nations.

62 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,

for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,

till her vindication shines out like the dawn,

her salvation like a blazing torch.

2 The nations will see your vindication,

and all kings your glory;

you will be called by a new name

that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.

3 You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand,

a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

4 No longer will they call you Deserted,

or name your land Desolate.

But you will be called Hephzibah,

and your land Beulah;
 for the LORD will take delight in you,
 and your land will be married.

5 As a young man marries a young woman,
 so will your Builder marry you;
 as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,
 so will your God rejoice over you.

Points of Interest:

Fashion Show of the Day--Robes of righteousness

Maybe it's just because I like to keep half an eye on the latest fashion trends myself, but I'm struck by how often Isaiah revels in imagery of putting on new clothes. Once again, God uses fabulous, unexpected fabrics for new clothing designs. Earlier on, we had God making clothing of splendor. In yesterday's passage, we had a hat made of beauty, and other items woven out of praise. Here, God introduces a whole new clothing line. It draws its inspiration from weddings, with some priestly touches. There is a robe made completely of righteousness, and a skirt which skillfully employs touches of salvation. Like all of the best designs, it's high fashion, but you can pull off wearing it on the street.

I think Isaiah turns to clothing images so often because changing clothes is a very quick and effective way to change your persona. With the simple act of taking off one set of clothes and putting on another, you can look like a completely different person, and even feel like one. It reminds me of the phrase, 'The clothes make the man,' or of Clark Kent taking off his suit and glasses to become Superman. It reminds me most of *My Fair Lady* when Henry Higgins gives Eliza Doolittle a makeover, and she is transformed inside and out from flower girl to proper lady.

Untranslated Hebrew Words of the Day--Hephzibah and Beulah

The translators' notes tell me that *Hephzibah* means, 'my delight,' and *Beulah* means, 'married.' It's unclear to me why they left these two in the original Hebrew but translated all of the other nicknames in this passage into English. Nice names, though. I particularly like, 'My Delight.'

Image of the Day--Seeds of righteousness

Righteousness, that ability to stay on the right path, is right now a tiny seed. It's unremarkable and vulnerable, but it's also packed with potential. God will serve as both the soil and the water, making sure that the seed grows, and flourishes, and multiplies. Soon righteousness will overrun the place; there's no way it could be ignored.

Phrase of the Day--If you love it so much, why don't you marry it?

God's answer: 'I think I will.'

God is the architect for and builder of the completely renovated New Zion. God does the finishing

touches, steps back, takes a look, and decides that it's turned out perfectly, just as imagined; it's God's masterpiece. God is so delighted by it that, in a surprise move, God decides to marry the city.

Taking it Home:

For you: Sticking to the fashion theme, I can't hear talk of beautiful clothes without thinking about bodies. Because let's be honest, good clothes feel a lot better when you're pleased with the body underneath them, and vice versa. Bodies. Theologians throughout the ages score pretty high on neglecting this area, so much so that bodies hardly get mentioned. But you know, we spend a lot of time in our bodies and experience a good chunk of the world through them. How do you feel about your body? Do you like it? Hate it? Forget that it's there? Is it aching? In pain? Suffering? Talk to God how you feel about your body and see what God has to say in return.

Wednesday, April 9th--Isaiah 62:6-12

6 I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem;
they will never be silent day or night.

You who call on the LORD,
give yourselves no rest,

7 and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem
and makes her the praise of the earth.

8 The LORD has sworn by his right hand
and by his mighty arm:

"Never again will I give your grain
as food for your enemies,
and never again will foreigners drink the new wine
for which you have toiled;

9 but those who harvest it will eat it
and praise the LORD,
and those who gather the grapes will drink it
in the courts of my sanctuary."

10 Pass through, pass through the gates!
Prepare the way for the people.

Build up, build up the highway!

Remove the stones.

Raise a banner for the nations.

11 The LORD has made proclamation

to the ends of the earth:

“Say to Daughter Zion,

‘See, your Savior comes!

See, his reward is with him,

and his recompense accompanies him.”

12 They will be called the Holy People,

the Redeemed of the LORD;

and you will be called Sought After,

the City No Longer Deserted.

Points of Interest:

Image of the Day--*Chattering watchmen*

I don't know who 'I' is at the beginning of this passage, the Servant or God, but one or the other of them hires watchmen to the task of pestering God. Every few minutes, they're supposed to yell out, 'I still don't see anything,' and then, 'No, still nothing,' and after a brief pause, 'Important update: nothing's happening.' It's a whole crew of them, so that they can work around-the-clock shifts until God acts.

I think the point is to nudge God more in the 'quickly' direction, over the 'when it happens' side of the equation.

Promise of the Day--*The one who does the work gets the reward*

This feels like a small but important promise from God: freedom from the bullies and the oblivious.

Imagine a patient and industrious wine-lover. They grow the grapes all the way from vine cuttings. They wait all season until the grapes are perfectly ripe. They press the grapes, let them ferment, age the wine, bottle it, and wait for the perfect occasion to uncork that first bottle--only before they ever get the chance to taste it someone else comes along and, either out of malice or simply out of ignorance, gulps down the whole bottle. Maybe you feel like something like that has happened to you one time or another. Maybe you feel like it's the story of your life.

God's promise here is that that will never happen again. You don't need to be afraid of being scooped. There's no need to pre-emptively gulp it down yourself, no need to install a security system for the wine cellar. You will have the chance to savor the fruits of your labor, at your leisure.

Announcement of the Day--*Open for business*

Send out the news, have a banner made, hire people to wear those sandwich boards and hand out fliers. Let everyone know, 'God's new Zion is now open for business.'

Jerusalem's Nickname of the Day--*Daughter Zion*

Isaiah keeps piling on the images to describe just how dear Zion is to God. It's like God is a famous architect, and Zion is God's masterpiece. No, it's more like Zion is the love of God's life, and it's their wedding day. Or maybe God is a doting parent, and Zion is God's favorite daughter.

Taking it Home:

For our church: I think there are ways where our church feels like the watchman: waiting, and looking, checking the clock, walking in circles, and keeping our eyes peeled; waiting to see God act and fulfill promises made to our community of faith. Talk to God about church. Are there promises you feel like God has made to our church? Remind God about them. Would you like to see God act in a specific way in our church? Tell God so. As we get closer to the end of Lent, ask God to act quickly and in an affectionate-Zion-loving way toward our church in the year ahead.

Thursday, April 10th--Isaiah 63:1-6

63 Who is this coming from Edom,
from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson?

Who is this, robed in splendor,
striding forward in the greatness of his strength?

"It is I, proclaiming victory,
mighty to save."

2 Why are your garments red,
like those of one treading the winepress?

3 "I have trodden the winepress alone;
from the nations no one was with me.

I trampled them in my anger
and trod them down in my wrath;
their blood spattered my garments,
and I stained all my clothing.

4 It was for me the day of vengeance;
the year for me to redeem had come.

5 I looked, but there was no one to help,

I was appalled that no one gave support;
 so my own arm achieved salvation for me,
 and my own wrath sustained me.

6 I trampled the nations in my anger;
 in my wrath I made them drunk
 and poured their blood on the ground.”

Points of Interest:

Geography and History Lesson of the Day--*Edom and Bozrah*

Edom (aka Esau) was Jacob's semi-estranged twin brother. The two of them mostly went their own way in life, and when they did happen to run into one another it was always a bit tense. The nations descended from each of them ended up with a similar relationship to that of the two brothers. The people of Edom settled just to the south of Judah; Bozrah was their capital.

I don't know whether Edom is mentioned here just to bring some local color to this image of the striding giant warrior, if Edom is a stand-in for all of Jerusalem's enemies, or if Edom particularly gets God's ire. Apparently, during the famous conquest and exile which serves as the backdrop for our Isaiah readings, the Edomites had joined the Babylonian army and played something of a central role in that army's sacking of Jerusalem (Obadiah 1:8-12). When they should have had a brotherly response to Judah's misfortune, they instead celebrate it and even side with the enemy.

If I were to look at it from the Edomites' direction, I might call this a tad bit unfair. Jacob was far more likely to steal Esau's food than the other way around (see Genesis 27:18-35, for instance). And later on in history, David--the king of Israel and Judah--conquered Edom, and they were a Judean vassal state all the way until the time of the Babylonians 400 years later. So, it's not like they primarily played the bully role in the relationship.

I guess God is kind of like a parent when two of their kids are fighting: 'I don't care who hit whom first. You're both grounded.'

Grisly Moment of the Day--*That's an interesting shade of red ...*

When the warrior is seen from far away, it looks like they're wearing one of those new splendor garments; the fabric has a really interesting pattern, in a vaguely familiar shade of red. As the warrior gets closer, the watchers start to think, 'Maybe it's actually not splendor at all. I think that's a wine spill.' Finally, in a dreadful moment, it becomes clear that that's not wine at all; the warrior is spattered with blood.

Theology of the Day--*Vengeance*

You may remember from Monday's passage that the Servant's mission is two-pronged: bring about (1) the year of God's favor, and (2) the day of God's vengeance. I have to say that, at first blush, I'd be more comfortable if, as in Jesus' reading of it in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke

4:18-19), part 2 were simply left out. I don't think it can quite work that way, though. Good news for the poor may feel a lot more like bad news to the rich. Rescuing a prisoner means robbing the guards. If you're going to protect the caravan, it means killing the wild dogs. Retribution for those who've been robbed or cheated means punishing the thieves and bullies. Salvation and vengeance are two sides of the same coin.

I'm comforted by the fact that God's favor lasts a year, and God's vengeance goes on for only a day.

Also, it seems like everyone has a choice about the side of the coin they will see. Whether you're the object of God's favor or God's wrath isn't pre-determined. A foreigner who treats others well gets rewarded by God; an Israelite who uses the sabbath to abuse the wait staff faces punishment. God is committed to moving people down the highway to the new city he is building. Anyone who gets on the road, stays on it, and helps others along gets God's protection and provision. Anyone who puts up roadblocks better beware; God very well could get God's people safely home over your dead body.

Taking it Home:

For your six: Even if it kind of, sort of, logically makes sense that compassion and vengeance are different sides of the same coin, I still just don't really like it. I'd like it to be compassion and more compassion; compassion all around. It's just one of those things about God that's hard for me to get. I really don't want to hear about anyone's blood being smattered on anyone. Are there things that are hard or confusing for your six as they each relate to God? Ask God to make a way through any roadblocks your six might have when they think about relating to God.

Friday, April 11th--Isaiah 63:7-14

7 I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD,
the deeds for which he is to be praised,
according to all the LORD has done for us—
yes, the many good things
he has done for Israel,
according to his compassion and many kindnesses.

8 He said, "Surely they are my people,
children who will be true to me";
and so he became their Savior.

9 In all their distress he too was distressed,
and the angel of his presence saved them.

In his love and mercy he redeemed them;

he lifted them up and carried them
all the days of old.

10 Yet they rebelled

and grieved his Holy Spirit.

So he turned and became their enemy

and he himself fought against them.

11 Then his people recalled the days of old,

the days of Moses and his people—

where is he who brought them through the sea,

with the shepherd of his flock?

Where is he who set

his Holy Spirit among them,

12 who sent his glorious arm of power

to be at Moses' right hand,

who divided the waters before them,

to gain for himself everlasting renown,

13 who led them through the depths?

Like a horse in open country,

they did not stumble;

14 like cattle that go down to the plain,

they were given rest by the Spirit of the LORD.

This is how you guided your people

to make for yourself a glorious name.

Points of Interest:

Dramatic Change of Tone of the Day--*God's many kindnesses*

In yesterday's passage, God and/or the Servant showed their willingness to do the dirty work involved in a rescue attempt, if necessary. But they don't relish the task. They're not looking around for more objects of wrath. As soon as they can, they shift their attention back to their main job of looking for people to show kindness and compassion. The anger is carefully measured out, but the kindness is bottomless.

Bible History Lesson of the Day--*Forgetful people*

Perhaps it's understandable, after a passage like yesterday's, that Isaiah would feel the need to remind himself and his listeners of God's kindness. And, what do you know, as he looks back on God's history with the Israelites, what he sees is not the story of an angry God, but of a gracious--though sometimes exasperated--God and a forgetful people. Again and again, God would rescue the Israelites from some difficulty; they'd thank God for it, and things would go along well for a while. But whenever they came across a new problem, it's like that new problem completely pushed out of their minds the help they just received from God. Instead of remembering God's help, they ask, 'What are we going to do?' or even, 'Where is God?' or, 'Why doesn't God ever do anything?'

This happened just after the Crossing of the Red Sea. God miraculously extracts them from slavery, walks them through the sea, and protects them from a pursuing army. When they get to the other side of the Red Sea, they realize they're in a desert; there's not enough food for them. They panic, and yell out, 'Is God just going to let us die here?' They don't end up dying from starvation, but that isn't the last time--by a long shot--that they panic or complain as they walk through the desert. The same thing happens again when the Israelites settle into the Promised Land. Continually, when there's a drought or they're having trouble with their neighbors or something, they say, 'God's never around when you need him,' and they start worshipping the neighbors' idols instead, which never helps the situation.

Eventually, someone thinks, 'You know what, I vaguely recall that God's been pretty good at helping us out of these predicaments in the past. Maybe we should ask God for help.' And it's like God has had an ear cocked listening for those exact words. God comes to the rescue: sending miraculous bread in the desert, kicking out the encroaching neighbors, sending rain.

All God needed was to be asked. And all the people needed to do was remember to ask.

Taking it Home:

For you: I self-righteously think, 'If I ever walked through a parted sea--even just a small lake for that matter--there is no way that I would ever ever forget that.' I look down on the Israelites constantly. And later, I am always humbled. Following Isaiah's advice to the Israelites, take sometime to remember the past. I'd suggest just starting with a year, but go as far back as five if you'd like. Write down every good thing you can remember: things you are thankful for, answered prayers, etc. Look back on the list and take time to remember, contemplate, and thank God for the things he has done.

Saturday, April 12th--Isaiah 63:15-64:3

15 Look down from heaven and see,
from your lofty throne, holy and glorious.

Where are your zeal and your might?

Your tenderness and compassion are withheld from us.

16 But you are our Father,
though Abraham does not know us
or Israel acknowledge us;
you, LORD, are our Father,
our Redeemer from of old is your name.

17 Why, LORD, do you make us wander from your ways
and harden our hearts so we do not revere you?
Return for the sake of your servants,
the tribes that are your inheritance.

18 For a little while your people possessed your holy place,
but now our enemies have trampled down your sanctuary.

19 We are yours from of old;
but you have not ruled over them,
they have not been called by your name.

64 Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains would tremble before you!

2 As when fire sets twigs ablaze
and causes water to boil,
come down to make your name known to your enemies
and cause the nations to quake before you!

3 For when you did awesome things that we did not expect,
you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.

Points of Interest:

Flashback of the Day--*Enemies in the sanctuary*

Just when I think we're confidently striding into the New Zion era--the Servant has done his work, the 'Grand Opening' banner is hung, the nations are streaming in, foreigners and kings are joining in, God is doing whatever it takes to clear any last impediments to people making it there--we're yanked backwards to the times when foreigners didn't know God's name and to images of the Babylonians (and their Edomite henchmen) ransacking the pre-renovation temple.

Are Isaiah's Judean listeners having a hard time tracking with the grand story Isaiah is telling: 'Yeah, yeah, that's all very nice. But what we want to know is, when is God going to kick the Babylonians

out of the temple?’ Apparently, ‘It already happened, in chapter 48,’ is not a satisfactory answer.

Or maybe these are different enemies, merely modeled after the Babylonian conquerors. Perhaps it’s the drunken shepherds from chapter 56, who haven’t yet been removed from their positions and are stomping around the temple like a bunch of Edomites. Or maybe a new set of enemies has popped up, foxes in the henhouse just when we thought everything was safe and orderly.

Either Isaiah’s listeners aren’t keeping up, or we have a plot twist. I’m not sure which one.

Theology of the Day--Hardened hearts

God’s people here claim that God is ‘making them’ wander and ‘hardening’ their hearts. I’d be tempted to chalk this up to just another effort to shift the blame for their situation from themselves to God: ‘Well, we would have stayed on the right path if you just gave better directions!’ And that may very well be what’s going on. But maybe not. A couple of times in the Bible, most famously with the Pharaoh of Egypt during the Israelite escape (cf. Exodus 4:21), God admits to hardening someone’s heart against him so that God can punish them.

To me, that sounds an awful lot like cheating. Using your supernatural powers to make someone mad at you so that you can be angry back would be like grabbing someone’s wrist, forcing them to slap you in the face, and then slapping them back.

I wonder, though, if there’s a less magical, more relational way to look at this whole idea of hardening someone’s heart. Say I’m in a simmering conflict with a friend. There are things I could say that would turn the temperature down on the situation--things that would soften their heart toward me. There are other things I could say that would send the situation straight into full boil. Sometimes, in a sort of blind anger, I do the thing that propels us toward boil. Sometimes, in my better moments, I choose to say the thing that turns the temperature down. In the most difficult situations, I know what will soften the situation, and I know what will harden it, and I have the self-control to choose; but for whatever reason I feel that, this time, I just can’t afford to say the thing that will dial us down. Peacemaking can’t be my highest priority here. I wonder if that’s what going on with God and Pharaoh. Maybe it’s not so much that God is waving a wand and making Pharaoh do something he doesn’t want to do; it’s just that God is going to say something that God knows Pharaoh will really hate.

Maybe that’s what’s going on with God’s people in this passage as well. It’s not so much that God drives them off the road, as that God is doing something that irritates them, such that they tromp off in a fit of pique. And this time God won’t, or can’t, make it easier on them.

Taking it Home:

For our city: Most of my prayers have a central focus; it’s often myself. I’m struck in this passage, and so many others, that all of these prayers or conversations (or in this case frustrated bickering) begin with ‘we’. They’re collective cries and pleas, and the concept seems so foreign to me. Take some time to pray for our city, however instead of praying for it as a distant object or other entity, pray for it using only the plural pronoun. As you spend time out and about in the city, think of yourself as a part of it, connected to it and affected by the collective whole.

Sunday, April 13th--Isaiah 64:4-12

4 Since ancient times no one has heard,

no ear has perceived,

no eye has seen any God besides you,

who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

5 You come to the help of those who gladly do right,

who remember your ways.

But when we continued to sin against them,

you were angry.

How then can we be saved?

6 All of us have become like one who is unclean,

and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;

we all shrivel up like a leaf,

and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

7 No one calls on your name

or strives to lay hold of you;

for you have hidden your face from us

and have given us over to our sins.

8 Yet you, LORD, are our Father.

We are the clay, you are the potter;

we are all the work of your hand.

9 Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD;

do not remember our sins forever.

Oh, look on us, we pray,

for we are all your people.

10 Your sacred cities have become a wasteland;

even Zion is a wasteland, Jerusalem a desolation.

11 Our holy and glorious temple, where our ancestors praised you,

has been burned with fire,

and all that we treasured lies in ruins.

12 After all this, LORD, will you hold yourself back?

Will you keep silent and punish us beyond measure?

Points of Interest:

Theology of the Day--*The God who serves*

God has all the power, and all the authority; and God turns around and uses that authority on behalf of others. That's pretty unusual. It was unheard of among the other gods Isaiah was familiar with, and it's even unusual today among people who have lots of power, money, or authority. The basic way it works is that the more power, money, or authority you have, the more people you have who work for you. The weaker ones do what the powerful one needs done. The powerful one may be kind or not, give good bonuses and tips or not; regardless, it's always the powerful one's needs being met.

God says, 'You know, that's silly. I don't actually even need anything. How about I help you instead?' With God, being more powerful and authoritative means working on behalf of more people. God is like a waiter at a busy restaurant. You have to be patient and wait your turn, but if you do God will take good care of you.

Bad Choice of the Day--*Biting the hand that saves you*

In the very midst of the rescue attempt, the people God is trying to rescue bite, and kick, and scratch, and struggle as God tries to pick them up and carry them away. Isaiah asks, 'How then can we be saved?' It's a good question. If someone refuses to be rescued, how can they be rescued?

Image of the Day--*Potter and clay*

This is the flip side of the God who serves. With idols, the people are the potters and the gods are the clay. With God, it's the other way around. Despite God's bias toward serving, the fact is that God does have all the power. The power differential is as big as the one between a sculptor and the clay--even bigger. The clay may not always entirely cooperate with the sculptor; but in the end the sculptor shapes the clay to their purposes, rather than the other way around. I think that Isaiah is, not entirely fairly but perhaps reasonably, suggesting that God stop being so polite. Instead of asking, 'Do you know what you would like to order?' God should serve us a plate of salvation and make us eat it. It may be the only way.

Taking it Home:

For you: Five weeks down, and one more to go. How's this season of prayer (and fasting?) going for you? Do you feel like you're waiting at the table, hungry and wondering when on earth the waiter will come to get your order? Or do you feel more like clay with God choosing to form and sculpt you in a specific way? Take some time to reflect on what you're learning and what you've been praying for. Tell God that you're up for the wait *and* that you're willing to be clay-like.