Shepherd of the Bay Lutheran Church

Sermon Sunday March 19, 2017

Isaiah 42:12-21 -God Longs to Act & Save

There she sits, staring at an ultrasound. A picture of the child that is growing inside of her. As she stares at that ultrasound, she begins to imagine what it will be like. She thinks about taking the baby home and laying her down in the nursery she just painted. She thinks about her first day of school and what she will wear and how she will act. She thinks about taking her to soccer practices and dance recitals. About her sweet 16 and high school graduation. Will she be smart? Funny? Introvert or extrovert? There staring at that ultrasound she fast

forwards to Christmases and birthdays in the future. She can’t wait. Can’t wait to see her little girl. Can’t wait to share with her what she knows. Can’t wait to be a mom.

But she has to wait. That is the hard part. No matter how excited she is, her little girl will come when she is good and ready. As the day gets closer, this young mother gets more anxious. She has all the preparations ready. She has that little nursery set up as perfectly as it will ever be. She has read every book. Owns every piece of infant equipment she’ll ever need. Now all she needs is the baby. It is an agonizing wait. Then the day comes. And the labor is at the same time scary, painful - and exciting. You see, her little girl is almost here.

For those of you who have had children, you remember what it was like. Maybe it’s a scene you’ve watched your kids go through now that you are a grandparent. But is it a scene with which you have ever associated your heavenly father? Our God works in quiet ways. But that doesn’t mean he doesn’t care. That he isn’t longing for the day that you are with him in heaven. In our sermon text, the Lord uses this picture of a woman in labor, to picture his own longing for you. Isaiah writes, “14 “For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant. 15 I will lay waste the mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn rivers into islands and dry up the pools. 16 I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them. 17 But those who trust in idols, who say to images, ‘You are our gods,’ will be turned back in utter shame.”

In Galatians we read that when the time had fully come, God sent his son. We hear those words at Christmas services as a reminder of how the Christ-child was born into this world at the right time and place. But we rarely consider how the Lord longed for that day, much like an expectant mother. What that wait was like for him. Remember all that the Lord had put into place by the time of Isaiah and all that he endured in the process. He gave the promise to Adam and Eve that a Savior would come from their offspring and then watched Cain kill one of them when he killed his brother Abel. He watched the entire world descend into unbelief before the flood and preserved the promise through Noah and his family. He watched the world after the flood walk away from the truth before he made Abraham the father of the promise. He brought about the nation of Israel – Isaac, Jacob, and all his sons. He promised them a land and when he led that nation out of Egypt to that land, he endured nothing but constant complaining and rebellion. When he gave them the land of Israel, he watched them leave him behind for the idols of the surrounding peoples. He gave them kings, and then watched the kings themselves lead Israel astray.

And he wasn’t done. Consider all he would endure from the time of Isaiah until the time of Jesus. He would send the northern 10 tribes into exile as a warning to Judah. Only to watch the majority of its kings continue in the idolatry of the north. They too would be sent into captivity under the Babylonians. He would preserve them there. He would bring them back. Only to watch them leave behind his salvation by grace for a salvation by rules. Replace the idols of the nations around them with an idol of self that relied upon its own righteousness.

Now the time had come for the Savior to be born, but the nation of the promise didn’t want him! Herod tried to kill him as a baby. In our gospel lesson, we see the kind of reception Jesus got from the religious leaders! Consider all they saw! The miracles of Jesus. His teaching in the temple courts and their synagogues. Yet they were blind to it all. They continue in their rejection to the point of crucifying him. There our heavenly father is waiting to gather us into his family. To put this world to an end and give us the paradise he has always wanted us to have. And to give it all to us in his Son Jesus. And this is how the world received him. Of all the injustices the Lord had to endure, this is the greatest.

It is no wonder that the Lord described Israel the way he did in vs. 18-20, “18 “Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! 19 Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to me, blind like the servant of the LORD? 20 You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing.” The main failing of Israel was this – their blindness. God gave them a message of salvation. He built their society around the promise. And they were blind to it all. He made them his trusted ones, a nation that was committed to him as the nation of the promise. And they betrayed that trust with their idolatry and self-righteousness. How God longed to bring them home to heaven, more than any expectant mother! And how they resisted him and fought against him every step of the way.

God’s dealings with us today are no different. God is waiting like an expectant first time mom to gather you into heaven. He can’t wait to take you home. To share all he has with you there. Consider all that he has put into place and endured since the time of Jesus so that he might have you. At Pentecost he sent out his messengers to the four corners of the earth to share the message of the risen Christ. No matter where it went, two things happened. Some came to the faith and others fought against it. Through the ages he has watched as Christianity has marched on and been splintered and separated by false teaching and worldly ambitions. Now he has you. He has gathered you into his family by the waters of baptism. Nurtured your faith with his Word. Fed you in the Lord’s Supper. Consider all the spiritual advantages God has poured out upon you so that you could be his messenger, one committed to him.

What have we made him endure? He has given us such a message to share. But have we been faithful messengers? Or, like Israel, have we been too hard hearted to take it to heart. To really apply it to our lives. And so failed to share it with others. He has made us ones committed to him. But have we been so committed to him? Or have we made him endure constant affairs with different idols of our choosing. Always seeming to find something else in this world that we prefer to him. No mother ever had it so bad. At least the young mother gets to look forward to the birth of her first child in the delusion that he or she will be a little angel. But our heavenly father has dealt with failure, betrayal, and outright rebellion against him by those he longs to share heaven.

So why do it? As we said, the young mother waits for a child not knowing what she is in for. And when that child is born she won’t do anything to her the likes of which we do to our heavenly father day after day with our sin. So why continue? If we were in God’s shoes, I would think the temptation would be to do one of two things – either abandon the whole venture and let the world spin off into chaos. Or just end it, get it over with, and forget about those he hasn’t yet gathered in. But our God does neither. Despite all he has had to endure in his dealings with mankind and how he has longed for the end of it all, he waits. Isaiah tells us why, “It pleased the LORD for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious.” He keeps his promises, continues to gather people in and wait for the right time for the end, for one reason – his righteousness. His goodness. Because of who he is.

It is why he did what he did in our gospel lesson. What a hassle this act of kindness turned out to be! This man ends up being hauled in front of the Pharisees. When they don’t like what they hear, they haul his parents in. Finally, they insult him and throw him out. Why? Because Jesus healed him from blindness. So why do it? Because of who God is. Jesus used this man’s blindness as an opportunity to save him and others from spiritual blindness. As Isaiah says in our sermon text, “I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.” Why put up with the hassle? Because this is what he promised to do. This is what is right and good. And that is who he is.

It is why Jesus finally went to the cross. It was the ultimate act of rebellion. The ultimate act of a blind and deaf world. That those who had been chosen to be his messengers, ones committed to him, would crucify him. Yet he still reached out to them in his word. And finally went to the cross. Because this is what he promised. This is what is right and good. To die for the sins of the world that we might be right with God. This is who he is.

It is why he continues to do so today. He continues to bring people to spiritual sight, despite the reactions he faces that aren’t that much different from our gospel lesson. Consider how Baptism has been despised and misused. How often people have received this gift and seldom if ever given it any thought. Yet he is still there. Washing away sins. Gathering us into his family. Making the blind sea, turning the darkness to light. He does not forsake us. Because of his righteousness. Consider the Lord’s Supper. How many have wandered up to the altar without considering the precious gift they are about to receive. How many have went too long without receiving it, as though it meant nothing. Yet he is still there. Offering us the body and blood of Jesus and the forgiveness it won. Consider God’s Word. How often it has been twisted, changed, and misquoted. Or just completely ignored. Yet he is still there. Making the blind see. Turning the darkness to light. Making the rough places smooth. He will not forsake us. Because of his righteousness.

It would be an interesting perspective. To go back in time and see your mother before she had you. To see how she looked forward to meeting you. How she prepped the nursery and prepared for your arrival. How she looked forward to soccer games and dance recitals, birthdays and Christmases. How she longed to have you in the family. It gives us an even more interesting window into the mind of our heavenly father. How he waits and longs for you to be with him in heaven. How he was there when he gathered you into his family in baptism. How he was there when you learned your Bible Stories on your mother’s lap. How he was there when you received communion the first time and every time since. And how he will be there when it is finally time to take you home. How God longs to act and to save. Amen.