

Isaiah 65:17-25, Luke 21:5-19

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

I saw a new commercial this week. I've seen it a couple of times and I had to track it down online today to try to get a closer look at it. It's from Travelers Insurance (they're the company with the big umbrella for a corporate symbol). The commercial takes place at a watering hole in Africa. It's short; it's only about 30 seconds. But, it starts off with a zebra and a lion both there at the water hole drinking together. Next is a scene with an ostrich chasing a lioness, they're playing a game of tag. Then there is a cheetah up in a tree that's surrounded by a whole bunch of birds. A meerkat is using a giraffe, first as a lookout, sitting up there and looking around, the next thing you see is the meerkat diving off the giraffe down into the pool of water. There is a whole bunch of meerkats on the back of a crocodile as he is swimming along. The commercial ends up with a heard of elephants spraying all of the critters gathered there like a whole big sprinkler system getting everybody wet, and the voice over comes on and says "When you're not worried about potential dangers, the world can be a far less threatening place. Take the scary out of life and take the Travelers Insurance and see in the world in a different light." I am not trying to sell Travelers Insurance; I just think it's a really fun commercial. But whether they knew it or not, regardless if it was on purpose, Travelers Insurance is giving us some really great end times theology, or "eschatology" as it's called. And our lessons today are all about "eschatology".

Our reading from Isaiah comes from the section of the book that Bible Scholars call "Third Isaiah." It's dealing with the people of Israel as they returned from their exile 600 miles away in Babylon. They've spent 70-ish years out there. When the Persians overthrew the Babylonians, the Israelites were allowed to return to Jerusalem. They returned, they rebuilt, so long as they sent back the required tribute; that was a small price to pay to return to their homeland. Except that their homeland really wasn't all that hospitable anymore. The Babylonians had razed Jerusalem. They had torn down the walls, they destroyed the temple, carted off all the gold and silver and then rounded up all the political leaders and the business class and all those who were in charge of worship. And while the Israelites probably weren't returning to a desolate deserted ruin, neither were they returning to a vibrant, growing culture.

We could almost say that they were coming to a mission field, an over-grown, recovering landscape. They could see the former glory of David's palace, and of Solomon's temple. They saw the ruins of the city walls and the homes and business places, places where people played or worked. All of that needed to be rebuilt. All of that neglected and slowly returning to what it was BEFORE humans had settled in the area: soil and trees and brush and openness. And there, in the midst of the over-grown weeds and the mature trees, were the critters. The hoofed and the footed and the winged and all others that had taken up abode. There in the middle of the ruins of the kingdom of Jerusalem, Isaiah spouts this hymn. This *call* to the way that life *will* be, the call to the way life *ought* to be. Sounds of joy and delight echoing in the streets. Children will not die in infancy; adults will live

long and full lives; there will be food for all; there will be time when the wolf and the lam will eat together. Everyone will be safe, for the Lord God will take the scary out of life.

In Luke's gospel, Jesus is talking eschatology as well. Our gospel reading begins with people admiring the near completion of the temple - and yes, this is the same temple that Isaiah was just mourning about that was destroyed. But, Isaiah was writing in 500 BC. Here in the midst of this decades long rebuilding that had begun in about 10 BC, a building that really wasn't complete in Jesus' day. Here Jesus is talking about *not* how great the building of the temple is; no, he's talking about when the temple is NOT going to be standing anymore. Are you kidding me? The things not even finished and he's talking Demolition 201 (which WILL by the way happen by the Romans. A general named Vespian will come in and raise the temple in around 70 AD). But THEN he marches into what all's going to happen before he returns. 'Beware!' he says, 'Don't be lead astray by those claiming to be the Messiah,' for there will be - and there were indeed - many who claimed to be messiah all around the time of Jesus. The guy named Judas, son of Hezekiah, or Simon of Peraea, or Athronges, all around 4 BC. King Herod of Agrippa around 44 AD, and even a Roman general who went on to become Caesar, a guy named Vespasian (yes, that *same* Vespian), all claimed to be the messiah.

'Beware,' Jesus said, 'because the world is a very scary place.' And so I say to you, *Beware*. The end times are coming, lo, the end times are with us now! But that's because we've been **in** the end times ever since Jesus ascended into heaven. It doesn't matter what Tim LaHaye and the *Left Behind* series say. We need to remember that as Christians in the Lutheran tradition, we are called to life in two kingdoms. The kingdom of this world, with politics and rulers and taxes and wars and poverty and injustice and hatred and starvation; AND simultaneously, we are called to live in the Kingdom of God, where everyone is equal. And everyone has enough to eat; we all have a safe place to sleep. Where we take care of one another and watch over one another. And no one will be scared, ever.

Until THAT time comes, we are called to live in the NOW. We are called, NOW, to reach out to those in need. Be they here in our congregation, or on the West Shore, in Cumberland County, Allegheny Synod, in Ohio, out in the Pacific Northwest, or where ever people in need might be. Where ever **we** might be. We are called to live the gospel message. The message of Grace, and Love and Forgiveness. We are called, to use the words of Francis of Assisi, to "Preach the gospel always. If necessary, use words."

We live **in** hope and we live **with** the promise as Isaiah reminded us the promise of the new Jerusalem. Only not of a new Jerusalem rebuilt in Palestine. Isaiah tells us how it will be. Jesus tells us what it's going to be like until we get there. And we know too that we will never buy or under our own means build that New Jerusalem. That will only happen in God's time, yet that is the hope for which we live. That is the promise given to us in our baptism that the new Jerusalem WILL come. In the meantime we are called to live in the eschatological NOW. We are called to live in mission, to be good stewards of what we have been given; to strive to make this world as safe and as good and as welcoming for all people as we possibly can. Because as Traveler's Insurance reminded us, "When we're not

worried about potential dangers, the world can be a far less threatening place.”  
God takes the scary out of life and helps us see the world in a whole different light.

Amen.