

Isaiah 35:5-8; Luke 7:18-23

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

Three stories. Part one. Day after day she sits in the same chair. She stares out the window or she looks at a photo, but she doesn't really see either one. She hears the voices that are around her, but they are like light noise. The hum of a fan. What cannot be ignored was the emptiness inside of her. The hole in her life once taken up by her son, her child, her first born. Gone because of a driver who had too much alcohol. Taken from her, never to be returned. Her daughter and her younger son hurt as well, but she could not see them. Even though they all lived under the same roof. She could not deal with their pain, their suffering, their loss of their older brother, because her own grief was too overwhelming. It had a grip on her and would not let her go. And so she could not let go.

Part two. He could not stand. The words that the doctor had just spoken to him as cautiously and as caringly as any words could be spoken, you have cancer. This had to be a joke. The doctor was obviously trying to kid him, I'll be it a very dark, dark joke. He had never smoked. He had never had anyone in his family that smoked. He'd never been a miner; he'd never worked around asbestos. This was obviously a mistake. The tests were wrong. This couldn't be happening to him. God just wouldn't let it.

Part three. They had both lost their jobs. First him at the plant and then she while the school district had made cutbacks. They didn't need as large of an office staff anymore, or so they claimed. They still had enough money to purchase new football equipment, but to keep an office staff of twelve years on, no, no more money. He had hoped to pick up some work in construction. Maybe do some odd jobs, be a handy man. But while he did get some work, it was never enough to cover all of the bills. She eventually got a waitress position as she had when she had been in college many, many years ago, but the long hours constantly being on her feet led to her back problem flaring up and she had to quit. One child in middle school, the other close to graduating high school. They hadn't paid the mortgage in eight months. Cable and phone had been cut off two months ago. They had maxed out every credit card they owned. They had never tried to live beyond their means, and yet the letter now sat there on the dining room table staring at them in silence only seeing the one word, foreclosure.

Christ never promises that in following him we will never have any more problems. He never says that life, as a believer, will be without pain or suffering or illness or even death. What we are promised, is one oneness with him. What we are promised, is joy in God. What we are promised, is that in all that happens to us, God is walking right there next to us. Tonight, I invite you to come forward to receive laying on of hands and accept the anointing mark on our foreheads in oil as when we were baptized. I invite you to take part in being made whole.

Amen.