

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Advent 1 -- November 27th , 2011

Isaiah 63:16-17, 64:1-8

You, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name. Why, O LORD, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere you? Return for the sake. 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! For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.

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. 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? 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. No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins. Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

Dear children of God who are eager to praise our merciful Savior. Amen

I'm tired. I'm so tired. I'm not talking about physically. But I'm just tired of life. Do you ever feel that way? If you're in school, you can get tired of going to school day in and day out. No matter how much homework you do or tests you take or papers you write, there will always be more. And now it's time for exams. It's so easy to get tired with school. Maybe you're tired of work. You go to work at your job, or maybe your two jobs or three jobs, but you never seem to get ahead. You have mouths to feed, a mortgage to pay off, loans to pay off. And then when you think you do get ahead for a bit, the car dies or the refrigerator goes on the fritz, and you're right back to where you started. Tired. Weary of it all. It's like you are Sisyphus of Greek legend, who was condemned to push a huge boulder up a hill forever. Just as he is about to get to the top, the boulder slips and rolls back down the hill. So he has to start all over again and again and again. But unlike Sisyphus, if you're in school, there's always Christmas break to look forward to. If you're working, you can look forward to the time when you can retire and finally take it easy and do the things you've always wanted to do—the light at the end of the tunnel.

Do you ever grow weary of being a Christian? Do you ever feel like you've helped out around church so often that you just once wouldn't want to do it for a change? You've always been the one to decorate the church or serve on the council or give your for whatever project needs help and you're tired of doing it? You've asked your friend to come to church with you so often and been rejected that you just want to give up and throw in the towel? If you have a tendency to grow tired, weary of being a Christian and living as a Christian -- as we all do from time to time -- then Isaiah is speaking to you this morning. He encourages you:

Sermon Theme: Don't Grow Weary! Instead, Be Ready For Christ's Coming!

- 1. We become weary because of sin.**
- 2. We are made ready by God's love**

The first way to overcome our weariness as Christians is by remembering our Redeemer. It's easy for us to remember our Redeemer God -- the One who bought us back from all our enemies and gave us life eternal as a gift of his grace. It's easy because we do it year after year, Sunday after Sunday. Today, in

fact, we begin a new year of remembering our Redeemer as we begin a new church year. This is the first Sunday in the season of Advent. We look for Jesus' return at the end of the world, and at the same time look for his first coming in Bethlehem. The anticipation finally climaxes with our celebration of Christmas, when we remember that God became flesh and lived for a while among us in our place. Every year we remember the same things about the same Redeemer God that is ours. We remember our Redeemer as Isaiah did in our text: **"You, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name."**

Why do we remember that every year? Because our lives as Christians are not easy. We grow tired and weary of it. Why should we keep fighting the good fight of faith? It never seems to end. Why should we continually have to deal with friends who ridicule us for our faith, so we try to hide it? Why should we have to deal with a world that hates Christians and the life we are trying to live. Sometimes we hope Jesus will come right now -- to take us from this life of suffering and toil and pain and sorrow that never seems to end. Then we wouldn't have to deal with all the times we find ourselves falling into those dumb sins that we know we shouldn't be doing but we find ourselves doing. Then we wouldn't have any more suffering or sorrow. We wouldn't have to mourn another Christian who died for their faith or the attacks on Christians by Muslims in this world. No more unbelievers would get away with mocking God.

That's not a new idea. Isaiah was ready for God to come at his time already. He said: **"Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! 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! For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you."** Isaiah wanted God to finally show people who the boss is. Just like God did when he rained fire and brimstone down on Sodom and Gomorrah, or sent the plagues on Egypt and led his people through the Red Sea, or made the mountain of the Lord tremble when Moses received the Law of God from God's own hand, or when he sent fire from heaven to consume a sacrifice in Elijah's showdown with the prophets of Baal. Isaiah was waiting for God to rescue his wayward people as he had so often done in the past, especially by sending the Messiah. We have witnessed God sending that Messiah. Now we wait for Jesus to come again -- this time as the Ruler of heaven and earth who will save the righteous and make sinners pay forever.

But that ought to make us stop short. Because we have to count ourselves among those sinners. We have to see ourselves as being just as deserving of God's righteous anger against sin as any Muslim assassin who wants to kill Christians. We are just as deserving of hell. That's what Isaiah recalls as well -- not only does he remember his Redeemer, but he also recalls his and his people's sins. We need to as well.

Isaiah says: **"Why, O LORD, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere you?"** That's a strange phrase: God hardening hearts? But we have to realize that God only hardens people's hearts if they harden their hearts to him and his gospel message. Eventually his calls to repentance will stop, and that person who hardens their heart will no longer be able to repent because God will no longer throw his pearls of forgiveness before the swine who reject him. But sometimes even Christians can feel as if the blame is God's—and that is what Isaiah and the people at his time could think. It's God's fault that I'm in this situation, that my life is so hard. We get weary of it, and we don't think clearly. But God is actually the one who gives us his grace to enable us to deal with the hardships of life as a believer.

You can sense the back-and-forth thinking of the believer in the next section: **"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?"** Do you hear the despair in his words? He isn't just talking about the godless heathen that God is angry with. He is talking about God's own people -- even himself. So he says: **"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. No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins."** What a description of our sinful condition before God! No one can escape this true telling of what our sins are and have done to us before our almighty God. I mentioned

earlier that often we can feel tired and weary of being Christians. But sometimes we are the very cause of other Christians being tired and weary. How many times doesn't the weight of the work of the church fall on the backs of a few? How many times don't we hear the pastor ask for someone to help with something or bringing someone with us to church, and we think: "He must be talking about someone else"? Perhaps it's someone else's job to be welcoming to visitors. How often don't we think: "Someone else will do it" or "Someone else has done it in the past, I don't want to step on their toes"? And so we can go our merry way not lifting a finger to do the things God would have us do. When we do those things, we aren't getting tired and weary, we are making someone else tired and weary because they are doing the things we ought to be doing in the first place! How dare we think like that! But how often we do! And that includes all of us! Look at what Isaiah said: **"all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."** If that's the best we can do, no wonder we get weary of doing good!

But where we grew and grow weary of doing good, we again remember our Redeemer. Even when the weight of the world was on his shoulders, and the sin of the world—even when he knew what lay in front of him—he didn't grow weary of doing what was right. And then he sacrificed himself as the perfect sacrifice. So listen to the end of our text: **"Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand."** Even, and especially, when we are weary with sin and the rigors of the Christian life, we can again call God our Father, our Redeemer. Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. He made us one with God once again. He atoned for our sins completely. All our failures gone. Forever! Heaven is ours. God died for you and me! Such a message throws the weariness from our shoulders. We stand up strong in the grace and forgiveness of Christ. And we are ready to grow weary again for our Savior because he stopped at nothing to give us a new life in heaven, and a new life already here on earth.

The life of a Christian is a circle -- God is our Redeemer; we wander; he promises punishment; Jesus took it for us; God is our Redeemer again. Even if you've heard the message before, it is as if it is new every morning. Your salvation is assured because your forgiveness is won. And your Redeemer God will come soon to take you to himself in heaven. That's the light at the end of the tunnel. It gives us what we need to keep going. It fills our hearts with joy. It enables us to live a life of service to our God for all he's done for us. Don't grow weary of being a Christian -- look to your Redeemer and remember that he paid for your sins. Then serve him while you can on this earth. The light at the end of the tunnel is getting closer every day. One day we will be in the light forever. Don't grow weary. Instead, after spending your life in service to your Savior, be wary of his return with joy. Amen.