

Isaiah 35:1-10  
December 12, '10

"THE HOLY HIGHWAY"

SOME OF YOU REMEMBER THE DAYS PRIOR TO THE INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM.

WHILE I'M NOT QUITE THAT OLD, I DO REMEMBER WHEN THE LAST STRETCH OF I-94 WAS BEING BUILT, AN INTERSTATE THAT NOW RUNS FROM BILLINGS, MONTANA IN THE WEST TO PORT HURON, MICHIGAN IN THE EAST.

THE LAST 50 MILE EASTERN STRETCH WAS BUILT WHEN I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL & IT RAN NO MORE THAN 200 YARDS FROM MY HOME.

I REMEMBER RUNNING IN THE MIDDLE LANE FROM WHAT WOULD EVENTUALLY BE THE 10 MILE ROAD EXIT TO THE EIGHT MILE ROAD EXIT AND THEN BACK AGAIN.

I FOUND IT FASCINATING TO THINK OF TRAVELING ON FOOT IN THE MIDDLE OF WHAT WOULD SOON BE A SUPERHIGHWAY.

I ALSO REMEMBER TRAVELING TO EVANSVILLE FROM LOUISVILLE PRIOR TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF I-64.

THOUGH I MADE THAT JOURNEY MORE THAN 2 DOZEN TIMES, I'D HAVE NO IDEA TODAY HOW TO DO IT IF I HAD TO GET TO LOUISVILLE WITHOUT USING 64.

THOUGH A LOT OF FOLKS IN INDIANAPOLIS & OTHER PLACES AROUND THE STATE WOULD LIKE ME TO BELIEVE OTHERWISE, I'M PRETTY WELL CONVINCED THAT THERE ARE SOME PRETTY SOLID BENEFITS TO INTERSTATE TRAVEL.

THERE ARE SOME OBVIOUS DRAWBACKS AS WELL, THOUGH.

ONE OF MY FAVORITE PLACES TO DRIVE IS THE JOURNEY FROM TERRE HAUTE TO CHICAGO ON HIGHWAY 41.

FOR ONE THING, THEY MANAGE TO KEEP IT INTERESTING BY CHANGING THE SPEED LIMIT ABOUT EVERY 7 MILES OR SO & I JUST LOVE GOING THROUGH ALL THE LITTLE TOWNS ALONG THE WAY.

I THINK THAT'S THE MAJOR DRAWBACK TO INTERSTATE TRAVEL.

YOU MISS SEEING PEOPLE.

THERE ARE ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE & PLACES THAT YOU MISS ON AN INTERSTATE JOURNEY.

TRAVELING LIFE'S HIGHWAY IS MUCH THE SAME, ISN'T IT?

IT'S THE PEOPLE YOU MEET THAT MAKE THE JOURNEY INTERESTING.

IN THIS PASSAGE WE'VE READ FROM ISAIAH THIS MORNING, THE PROPHET GIVES US WONDERFUL IMAGES & BEAUTIFUL SYMBOLS OF HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.

IT MIRRORS THE VERSES WE READ LAST WEEK WHERE ISAIAH TOLD US ABOUT A LIVING BRANCH GROWING FROM A DEAD STUMP & THE MULTITUDE OF ANIMALS ROMPING & EATING TOGETHER IN PEACE & HARMONY WITH A LITTLE CHILD LEADING THEM IN THE FUN & FRIVOLITY.

ISAIAH'S TASK WAS AN EXTREMELY CHALLENGING ONE.

HE WAS CALLED TO SPEAK GOD'S WORD OF JUDGMENT UPON THE PEOPLE FOR THEIR DISOBEDIENCE WHILE AT THE SAME TIME HOLDING OUT HOPE FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE TO COME.

HERE IN THE 35<sup>TH</sup> CHAPTER, HE ASSURES THE PEOPLE OF FLOWERS BLOOMING IN THE DRY LAND, STREAMS FLOWING IN THE DESERT & BURNING SANDS BECOMING FRESH POOLS OF LIVING WATER.

BUT ISAIAH ALSO SPEAKS OF A HIGHWAY – A “HOLY HIGHWAY” HE CALLS IT.

IT'S A SAFE PLACE TO TRAVEL FOR THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN OPPRESSED, THOSE WHO ARE BELEAGUED, THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN BURNED BY THE FIRES OF LIFE.

DURING THIS TIME OF YEAR, WE TRAVEL ANOTHER “HOLY HIGHWAY.”

THERE WE FIND THE MAIN PLAYERS OF THE ADVENT DRAMA.

LIKE THE PEOPLE TO WHOM ISAIAH SPOKE, THESE ARE PEOPLE WHO NEED A WORD OF HOPE IN A TROUBLED TIME ALONG LIFE'S HIGHWAY.

THINK OF ELIZABETH & ZECHARIAH.

THEY WERE GOOD PEOPLE – SOLID PEOPLE – PEOPLE SEEKING THE LORD'S WILL IN THEIR LIFE'S JOURNEY.

BUT THEY LIVED WITH A HEARTACHE – THE HEARTACHE OF NEVER HAVING CHILDREN .

IN THEIR OLD AGE, IT SEEMED AS THOUGH THE TIME FOR SUCH A BLESSING HAD LONG SINCE PASSED.

THINK OF MARY – A YOUNG GIRL FINDING HERSELF IN THE MOST STUNNING PREDICAMENT IMAGINABLE – PREGNANT, THOUGH STILL A VIRGIN.

THINK OF JOSEPH, AN HONORABLE MAN PLACED IN AN EQUALLY STUNNING PREDICAMENT – THE GIRL HE DREAMED OF MARRYING WAS CARRYING A CHILD & HE KNEW THE CHILD WASN'T HIS.

AND WHAT OF THE SHEPHERDS – MEN SIMPLY GOING ABOUT THEIR NIGHTLY TASK OF CARING FOR SHEEP WHEN THEIR EVENING WAS INTERRUPTED BY LIGHTS & SOUNDS NEVER EXPERIENCED BEFORE.

ON THE OUTSIDE, ALL OF THEM MAY HAVE SEEMED TO HAVE IT ALL TOGETHER.

THEY MAY HAVE APPEARED, ON THE SURFACE, TO BE CALM & COLLECTED & IN CONTROL.

YET, INSIDE THERE WAS A PAIN & A HEARTACHE BEYOND COMPREHENSION.

THERE IS A SINGLE THREAD, THOUGH, THAT RUNS THROUGH THE FABRIC OF ALL OF THEIR LIVES.

EVERY ONE OF THEM – AS THEY TRAVELED “THE HOLY HIGHWAY” OF THEIR LIFE – WAS ENCOUNTERED BY AN ANGEL.

AND EVERY ONE OF THEM HEARD THE ANGEL SAY THE SAME THING.

IN LUKE 1:13, THE ANGEL SAYS TO ZECHARIAH (AND, IN ESSENCE, TO ELIZABETH), “*DO NOT BE AFRAID.*”

IN LUKE 1:30, THE ANGEL SAYS TO MARY, “*DO NOT BE AFRAID.*”

IN MATTHEW 1:20, THE ANGEL SAYS TO JOSEPH, “*DO NOT BE AFRAID.*”

IN LUKE 2:10, THE ANGELS SING OUT TO THE SHEPHERDS, “*DO NOT BE AFRAID.*”

AT EVERY TURN, AROUND EVERY CORNER, AT THE BEGINNING OF EVERY DETOUR ON LIFE'S HOLY HIGHWAY, GOD IS THERE TO OFFER HOPE – TO EXTEND THE COMFORTING ASSURANCE – “*DO NOT BE AFRAID.*”

LOOK AGAIN AT THIS PASSAGE FROM ISAIAH.

THE PROPHET SAYS, *“STRENGTHEN THE WEAK HANDS, AND MAKE FIRM THE FEEBLE KNEES. SAY TO THOSE WHO ARE OF A FEARFUL HEART, ‘BE STRONG, AND DO NOT BE AFRAID.’”*

MAYBE THOSE WORDS ARE FOR YOU.

MAYBE YOU’RE THE ONE WHO LIVES WITH A PAIN & A HEARTACHE BEYOND COMPREHENSION.

MAYBE YOU’RE THE ONE IN NEED OF AN ANGEL TO SAY TO YOU, *“DO NOT BE AFRAID.”*

I REMEMBER A MAN NAMED JOHN WHO OWNED A CAR DEALERSHIP – THE BIGGEST DEALERSHIP IN THE AREA.

WHEREVER HE WENT, HE WAS THE LIFE OF THE PARTY – ALWAYS LAUGHING, ALWAYS JOKING.

WELL, HIS BUSINESS WENT SOUTH & HE LOST EVERYTHING.

ON THE SURFACE, HE TRIED TO MAINTAIN APPEARANCES & ACT LIKE EVERYTHING WAS FINE.

ONE DAY, THOUGH, HE CAME TO THE CHURCH OFFICE & WAS GOING TO HAVE A TALK WITH MY MENTOR, MAC.

JOHN DIDN’T EVEN TRY TO PUT UP A FRONT.

HIS SHOULDERS WERE SLUMPED OVER & HE HAD A LOOK OF DEEP SADNESS & PROFOUND PAIN.

I SAW HIM GO INTO MAC’S OFFICE & ABOUT AN HOUR LATER, I HAPPENED TO BE CLOSE BY WHEN HE CAME OUT.

AS JOHN WALKED PAST ME, HE SMILED BROADLY & GREETED ME WARMLY STOOD AS TALL & AS STRONG AS I’D EVER SEEN HIM.

WHEN HE WAS GONE, I SAID, *“OKAY, MAC. HOW’D YOU WORK YOUR MAGIC THERE? WHAT’D YOU SAY TO HIM TO MAKE THAT KIND OF CHANGE SO QUICKLY?”*

MAC SAID, *“I DIDN’T SAY MUCH OF ANYTHING. I JUST SAT THERE & LISTENED TO HIM. THEN WHEN HE WAS READY TO LEAVE, I PUT MY HAND ON HIS SHOULDER & SAID, ‘JOHN, IT’S GOING TO BE OKAY. DON’T BE AFRAID.’”*

ISAIAH WAS THE ULTIMATE “IT’S GOING TO BE OKAY” GUY.

IN THE MIDST OF THE MOST DIFFICULT OF ALL CIRCUMSTANCES, HE ASSURED THE PEOPLE THAT AS THEY TRAVELED “THE HOLY HIGHWAY” OF LIFE, EVERYTHING WAS GOING TO BE OKAY & THERE ULTIMATELY, WAS NOTHING TO FEAR.

A COUPLE YEARS AGO, NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO DID A FASCINATING SEGMENT ABOUT A MINISTER IN TEXAS WHO HAD A REVELATION ABOUT INTERSTATE 35, WHICH RUNS THROUGH 6 STATES, FROM SOUTHERN TEXAS TO NORTHERN MINNESOTA.

THE REVEREND CINDY JACOBS SAID, *“ONE DAY WE WERE PRAYING, AND WE WERE READING ISAIAH 35, VERSE 8, WHICH TALKS ABOUT A HIGHWAY FOR HOLINESS & WE WERE THINKING, ‘WOULDN’T IT BE WONDERFUL IF ALONG THIS HIGHWAY 35 HERE, THAT THERE WAS A SPECIAL TIME WHERE GOD JUST TOUCHED EVERYBODY THAT LIVES IN ALL PARTS OF THIS HIGHWAY.’”*

HER GROUP STARTED A PRAYER CAMPAIGN CALLED “LIGHT THE HIGHWAY” WITH CHURCHES ALL ALONG THE ROUTE PARTICIPATING.

DURING THIS SEASON OF ADVENT, PERHAPS WE ARE BEING CALLED TO “LIGHT THE HIGHWAY” FOR SOMEONE ELSE.

THERE ARE THOSE WHO FEEL NOTHING BUT DARKNESS ALL AROUND THEM – THOSE WHO ARE AFRAID OF WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS – THOSE WHO ARE AFRAID THEY HAVE NOWHERE TO TURN – THOSE WHO ARE AFRAID THEY’LL BE NEVER BE WHOLE AGAIN – THOSE WHO ARE AFRAID THAT LIFE WILL NEVER AGAIN BE FULFILLING & EVEN THOSE WHO ARE AFRAID THAT LIFE WILL NEVER BE FULFILLING FOR THE *FIRST* TIME, LET ALONE *AGAIN*.

PERHAPS GOD IS CALLING YOU TO BE ONE OF THE DIVINE ANGELS WHO WILL MINISTER TO THOSE PEOPLE ALONG “THE HOLY HIGHWAY.”

YOU MAY NOT RECOGNIZE THEM, OF COURSE.

LIKE ELIZABETH & ZECHARIAH, LIKE MARY & JOSEPH, LIKE THE SHEPHERDS – EVERYTHING MAY SEEM OKAY ON THE OUTSIDE.

LOOKING AT THEM & TALKING TO THEM ON THE SURFACE, YOU MAY CONCLUDE THAT EVERYTHING IS FINE.

LIFE IS GOOD.

THEY’VE GOT NO TROUBLE & NO PROBLEMS.

BUT ALSO LIKE THOSE MAIN PLAYERS OF THE ADVENT DRAMA, INSIDE THEY MAY BE EXPERIENCING A PAIN & A HEARTACHE BEYOND BELIEF.

A LISTENING EAR, AN ARM AROUND THE SHOULDER & THE ASSURANCE THAT “*EVERYTHING’S GOING TO BE OKAY – DON’T BE AFRAID*” CAN WORK WONDERS.

AND MAYBE, AS ONE OF GOD’S ANGELS, YOU’RE BEING CALLED TO OFFER MORE THAN JUST A LISTENING EAR, A WARM EMBRACE & A WORD OF HOPE & ASSURANCE.

MAYBE YOUR CALL IS TO HELP THEM DO WHATEVER NECESSARY TO PUT THOSE FEARS TO REST.

MAYBE YOUR CALL IS TO HELP THEM FIND FLOWERS BLOOMING IN THE DRY LAND, STREAMS FLOWING IN THE DESERT & BURNING SANDS BECOMING FRESH POOLS OF LIVING WATER.

WHETHER IT’S YOU WHO NEEDS THOSE ADVENT ANGELS OR YOU WHO IS CALLED TO *BE* ONE, LET THE WORDS OF ISAIAH RING LOUDLY THIS SEASON – “*DO NOT BE AFRAID.*” AMEN.

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport  
Eastminster Presbyterian Church  
Evansville, Indiana*