



September 2, 2007

Isaiah 40:1-8  
**Blowing in the Wind**  
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The prophet Isaiah begins our text: “Comfort, O comfort my people,’ says your God.” Those words were first spoken to a people who had spent a long time in exile and who were waiting to get back to the right place. As the years piled up, they just continued to wait.

We know about waiting. And just because we get a lot of practice, that doesn’t mean we’re good at it. We wait in lines at the grocery, at the bank, and at the airport. We wait in the reception areas of doctors and dentists. We wait in cars for traffic and in airplanes forever. We have to wait to hear the news from the lab reports about our health, we wait to hear if we got the job after an interview, and we wait to hear if the phone is going to ring again after a first date. Young or old, male or female, rich or poor—we wait. And it all leaves us a little cranky.

The only real comfort when you’re waiting is hearing that the wait is almost over. That is Isaiah’s good news to the Hebrew exiles in Babylon. “You have served your term,” he claims. The waiting is over.

It is important for us to remember that when the Hebrews were taken to Babylon, they were not cast into slavery nor was life particularly hard for them. Things even seemed to improve when the Persians took over. We know that while they were in exile, the Hebrews held jobs and some even held positions in the royal administration. They raised their families in peace, bought property, built homes, and were free to worship. So this is not like their suffering under the oppressive taskmasters of Egypt. The problem with life in Babylon wasn’t that it was miserable as much as it was disappointing. That’s because it simply wasn’t the right place for the Hebrews to be.

We know about that as well as we know about waiting. Few of us here today would say that our lives are miserable. When we see the conditions of life in the Middle East or Sudan, we feel badly about complaining at all. But we still do it.

A while back I went to the airport to catch a plane. The day had begun well, and I was content. I made my way to the kiosk which told me there was a problem with my ticket and to see an agent. The woman behind the counter punched up my reservation on her computer and then nicely said, “I’m sorry Mr. Barnes, but you’ve been downgraded.” I exclaimed “Downgraded? I’m flying coach. How much further down can I go?” She looked puzzled and said, “Yes, you are flying coach, but this is instructing me to downgrade your ticket.” Now I’m wondering if I will be in the baggage compartment. The agent got her supervisor who dove into the computer and then figured out what happened. Overnight the computer had upgraded my ticket, but then someone came along willing to buy a first class ticket. Since I hadn’t checked in yet, my ticket was returned to coach. Now, I was no longer content. When I boarded the plane, I walked past all of those big, comfy seats in first class and made my way back to steerage where I belonged. I plopped down in a perfectly good coach seat, that I would have been happy to have—had I not known about being downgraded. But now I was grumpy, especially when the flight attendant pulled that curtain that protects the holy of holies in first class.

How very silly. I was getting exactly what I had paid for. I actually had to whack myself in the head to get it back on straight. We have it pretty good. We are not by any means miserable, but we don't need a lot of help to imagine how life could be upgraded a bit.

Maybe like the exiles, you are disappointed that life is not in the right place, and you are looking for a way to get it there. Maybe the someplace else you want to be isn't Jerusalem. It might not be a different place geographically. Maybe you are not happy with the place where your most important relationships have fallen, or possibly you yearn to get your health in a better place, or it could be that your career is not in a good place. And you know that you get so focused on your dreams for this imagined Jerusalem, the better place, that it is hard to be content with your many blessings.

With our faces turned toward Jerusalem, we become devoted to the search for a highway that will get us there—perhaps a new job, going back to grad school, another exercise program, or a diet. It doesn't matter that these roads have not led us to the place of our dreams in the past. We're addicted to their mythologies. And so we throw ourselves into road construction to build the highway to the right place, trying to level a mountain of obstacles and erecting bridges over our valley of discontent. But according to Isaiah, that is not how our lives are made right.

"Prepare the way of the Lord," he said, which essentially means to make way for him. "Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley *shall be* lifted up." That's not your job description, it is a promise of what God will do. "Every mountain and hill be made low... Then the glory of the Lord *shall be* revealed, and all people shall see it together." In other words, it is God who constructs the highway. He builds it not so you can get to your dreams but so he can get to you, which has always been his dream.

Earlier in the summer, Dawne and I were driving through the Rocky Mountains on our way to a conference. Every time I make that drive, I am in awe of how much work it takes to build a road over mountains and valleys. It's an incredible undertaking. But can't you just see yourself out there all alone, armed with a little pickaxe, knocking yourself out, trying to build your own highway, and frustrated because it is taking so long. Put away your little pickaxe and hammers. It is not our job. Our job is to see, together, the glory of the Lord when it is revealed.

Although the Hebrews did return from exile, they waited for centuries before seeing the glory Isaiah promised. Then one day, John the Baptist came out of the wilderness, according to Luke, echoing these very words, "Prepare the way of the Lord. Every valley shall be filled. Every mountain and hill made low." And then he baptized Jesus. And then the heavens opened, and a voice was heard saying, "You are my son, the beloved." And then the glory of the Lord was revealed.

Do you see? Glory for your life is found not by climbing up to the right place. Glory is found by the Word of God who climbs down to you in Jesus Christ. Just as he once made his way down to the shores of the Jordan River, so is he building his own highway into your life.

It is for this reason that we consistently call you to the devotional life and why we publish the Daily Readings book every year. It takes training to see the Savior who is with us. The way we train our eyes is by devoting them first to the Word of God, which refers not only to the Bible but also to Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

This is the Word, who was with God, and who is God from the beginning. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came to be. This means that when the Word, Jesus Christ, comes to you, it is to create for you a life. That life will unfold in ways that are far beyond the reaches of your imagination, and it doesn't matter how old you are, there is still so much more life to be received. Only when you learn to receive life are you free to enjoy it.

You are free to stop thinking about how to self construct your life because the Creator of your life is near. Every day you are blessed with more glory than you could possibly even see. You are free to stop focusing on little upgrades because as Isaiah claims, that is all just grass. The grass may flower for a season, but it always fades. Only the Word of God endures forever. Best of all you are free to stop waiting for life to get to the right place, because wherever you see that Jesus Christ is with you is the right place. Amen.