

Even the Ruins Sing

Isaiah 52:7-10 † First United Methodist Church, Des Moines
December 25, 2011

I carry this iPhone with me almost anywhere. People around the world can contact me immediately by email, text message, or phone.

But 2,500 years ago, messages arrived differently. Messengers ran and traveled on foot between human settlements to bring the news. Because news arrived intermittently, it was more precious when it arrived.

In this morning's reading from Second Isaiah, the prophet describes the delight good news brings. A human messenger has arrived in Jerusalem to announce peace and rescue for the nation of Israel – to bring good news. Good news is the most precious news of all.

What good news does this messenger bring?

God has acted, and everyone can see what God has done. As Isaiah poetically writes: “[God] has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

“In plain sight,” Isaiah expounds, “they see the return of the LORD to Zion.”

And not only does everyone see, all of Jerusalem rejoices in song; even the ruins left by the Babylonians' systematic destruction of Jerusalem “break forth together in singing.”

While Isaiah wrote this prophecy to predict the return of exiled Israel to Jerusalem from Babylon, Christians read it differently. We see “the salvation of our God” in a birth in Bethlehem, which we celebrate today.

Surprisingly, with so much at stake, God chooses to reveal salvation and peace in what seems to me a most risky manner. Notice how God's good news does not come. No mighty warrior leads legions of angelic hosts armed for battle against evil. No fully grown human being bursts forth unavoidably in a blaze of glory.

Instead, the salvation of God comes in a newborn child – dependent, vulnerable, needing the care and nurture of many simply to survive. God's glory can be nestled in the crook of a human arm.

This may well be the greatest discovery of this great day. God bares his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, if we know where to look. God's salvation can best be seen in the vulnerable, fragile, everyday places of our lives. God's reign shines forth in the vulnerable, dependent, and fragile people God brings into our lives.

The babe born this very day in Bethlehem teaches us that God's salvation comes to us in *plain* sight, and most often *plainly* in the little, ordinary, commonplace events of our lives where we may not think to look.

Once we learn the Christ child's lesson, everything changes.

We learn we live in the Wonder of God's Love all the time. We learn that nothing can separate us from the Love of God in Christ our Lord. We can see God's glory glimmering all around us: the Light shining in every darkness; no darkness ever able to extinguish it.

There is no more precious and delightful good news than that good news.

And when we understand the magnitude of God's love for all, we *must* break forth into singing. Even the broken and battered ruins of our lives – and of the world – cannot keep still one second longer. As in ancient Israel, even the ruins sing.

We join the chorus high above us and all around us: "Glory to God in the highest, and, on earth peace and goodwill to all."

In the name of the One God, Holy and Undivided Trinity. Amen.