

A CHILD'S VIEW

Consider Winston Churchill's famous words, "This is Britain's finest hour."

One can not understand those words unless one understands what was happening in Britain in 1940.

That year, 1940, could also be seen as Britain's darkest hour—a time of great fear and anxiety.

Most of Western Europe was overrun by Hitler's troops. France had just fallen. There was a massive evacuation of troops from Dunkirk and a very real fear that England would soon be invaded and face Hitler's tyranny.

It was in THAT context that Winston Churchill stood up in the House of Commons and said, with conviction, "We are not in any way defeated... people looking back will say that this was our finest hour!"

His voice of hope carried a vision of Britain's strength and courage.

The people of Great Britain chose hope and to not give up.

They sent their children to the north, away from the bombing, and honed their resolve to live, to persevere.

I question their subsequent choices, such as escalating the violence,.... but that evaluation can be relegated to coffee table bantering, and is not part of today's point.

In 1940, they chose to not surrender to the ugly, to fear and to the hopeless negativity of pessimism.

Just as the events of 1940 give depth to Churchill's famous words, we must also understand the situation Isaiah was addressing to fully appreciate the message from the Isaiah 43 passage.

Judah was a tiny country in the shadow of powerful neighbours. In the 100 years before today's text, the country had fallen repeatedly into the hands of the Assyrians, the Egyptians and the Babylonians. The first audience of this message had, for generations, only known war and invasions, and now many of them were captives in a foreign land – Babylon or were living by the ruins of their temple, with no crops and no money. Abraham's remnant was scattered, and this dark and starving time is the context of Isaiah's message ofhope.

Broken people tend to hear God's saving message a little clearer than those still standing on their own.

The message from Isaiah:

When hardships confront you, when pain is all around you will not be defeated, you will NOT be overwhelmed.

God is present. You are precious to God and God loves you.

So do NOT fear.

Then jumping to verse 18: there is the prompt—Move on! Don't let the past sorrows sink you into despair. God is about to do a new thing.

The situation may seem dark and hopeless, but there will be a way in the wilderness. A river will run through the desert.

Look and you will find the way.....with God.

These are powerful words for broken people,..... but they are silly words for powerful people.

Those who can get through life on their own, do not appreciate salvation.

To frame that in another way:

most of my most difficult times are now some of my most cherished memories. Because, during those dreadful occasions / those times of brokenness.... I discovered God's touch renewed and new layers of grace.

When all I could see was a hostile wilderness and a dry desert, a pathway appeared and river through the desert.

This is NOT to suggest an instant rescue.

To be perfectly honest, I wish the wilderness and the desert would have been instantly removed and everything made wonderful,.... but that is not reality..... because if that happened,.... then we would not learn to trust.

If we are in a wilderness, we still need to journey our way out, and it may take a while. But we are not alone. We are NOT alone.

Experiences such as, illness, calamity, death of a loved one, financial turmoil and divorce can lay us low, very low..... perhaps to the point where we can't proceed and we've run out of tears.

In THAT wilderness/ in those deserts we can more clearly hear the voice of God because we no longer have distractions **and** the trust in our own personal power.

Granted, we still can chose to cover our hears and eyes, and reject the opportunity to grow..... and to trust. And,.... that is a pitiful decision, that happens all too often.

Even so, when strength returns and we are back on our feet and out of the desert, we seem to so quickly forget..... and go back to living under our own control again.

Have you noticed that? I wonder why that is?

In fact, we put a lot of thought and energy into being self reliant / self sufficient. Most of our dreams for the future include being the master of our destiny, instead of being..... a broken servant.

I may have over stated that by saying "broken servant", but maybe not??

We learn and grow the most when we struggle and have to depend on God, yet we try hard to avoid such situations..... interesting, including the part about depending on God,..... and then we wonder why we are so unhappy, bitter and alone.

This is NOT a lesson about turning lemons into lemonade.... nor is this about flowering where ever you are planted.

Those are nice axioms, yet today's lesson is about learning to have hope when there is no reason to hope. Or, in other words, learning to trust.

Near the end of Jesus' time on earth, things were not going well. Likely, the disciples were extremely disappointed; things were not going as they had desired and expected.

The church they were involved in was falling a part, and they didn't like it one bit..... and they were perplexed.

They had been following Jesus for three long years, and they finally got to Jerusalem, but then things turned in a different direction.

They were no longer in control.

This is the context of Communion / the Last Supper with Jesus.

It is good to know the context because.....

In a few minutes, we will recall this gathering when we do communion.

Two thousand years ago, using the Seder meal, Jesus encouraged them to think back. Recall the vision. Recall the message.

And Jesus, with his added symbolism of the broken bread and poured out wine, challenged them to take hold of something divine – something transcendent.

The last supper was NOT a final toast to an idealistic ministry.

Not at all.

Communion is an invitation to embrace the life and message of Christ. When we do communion, we are declaring that we take on this message / we take it in.

Moreover, deeply ingrained / at the core of Christ message and life.... is an unwavering trust in God.....even to the cross.

Today's New Testament lesson is but one example of that complete trust / that way of being / of engaging with life..... of relating to God.

Isaiah presented rescue from a wilderness and a desert.

Jesus gives clarity to God's way OUR way of being saved, and that clarity is being a child.

From the Mark passage, Jesus said, "LET the children come..."

Let the child come through....

Because,.... the kingdom of God belongs to children, therefore,..... we must be as a little child.

As a child?????

How does a child interact with the world?

How does a child see the future?

How does a child perceive life?

If it is Monday,..... a child may look ahead as far as Friday.

As far as life,..... well that depends on the weather, if friends are around and what the parents are doing.

A child leaves the worries and details to the parents.

When I was a child, about 7 or 8, my father told me to go to Ernie's and pick up his shoes.

Ernie ran a shoe repair shop on Bloor street, just a block down from Jane Street, in Toronto.

In those days, people tried to first fix and resole their shoes, instead of replacing them.

My father had a funeral to go to, so he needed his good shoes.

He told me what to do. He enabled me—gave me directions and the exact amount of money, and sent me on my way. And, that was it.

Obediently, I went to Ernie's.

I think Ernie was an Eastern European Jew. I don't know for sure???

As a child, I only saw him as entertaining and excitable.

At the shoe repair shop, Ernie was in a panic, and said, "The shoes aren't ready. I thought I had two more days. Oh my gosh, the glue will never dry in time."

Let's STOP and jump out of the story for a moment.

An adult getting the shoes would have likely taken "ownership" of the problem— felt anxiety.... and maybe even tried to pressure Ernie.

But,.....I was a child. I was only asked to go to Ernie's with the money and get the shoes.

The burden of the whole process was NOT mine.

I didn't need to fret or worry about the situation because I was doing my part faithfully.

So, I went home with a message and without the shoes.

As soon as I got home, my father told me to go back to Ernie's.

He said that Ernie just called and offered to loan my father a new pair.

It all worked out. no big deal. I just did my part.

But, I was only a child..... no need to worry. I wasn't in control.

A child is Not in control, so a child can freely engage and enjoy.... that sounds nice doesn't it?

That is one example of a child's view.

Another is of fully trusting / knowing that a parent or parents are protecting and taking care of things.

Ideally, a child is cared for. A child looks to parents for safety and comfort. That is another view that a child has..... And woe, to those who steal that view.

A child's view that I want to end with is the child's view while being gently held in a rocking chair.

That view is a warm, soothing view with the feel of **breath** from being close to a source of love. That view is full of peace and hope, with the assurance that whatever happens will be okay.

There is only one way to be gently held in a rocking chair and have that view..... and that is to surrender to the one who loves you.

God is active in the world / in our lives because God loves us. God is love.