

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen!

“Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob, O dead ones of Israel, for I myself will help you, declares Yahweh, your Restorer, the Holy One of Israel.”

Isaiah 41:14.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

[*Animal*] If you could become any animal in the world, what would you be?

— Maybe like *Isaiah* you would soar on wings like an eagle. (*Thank you choir*)

— Or like *Amos* perhaps the lion is your animal of choice,
because you love to rumble in the jungle!

— Or maybe like *Elisha* you boast in the bear
because when it comes to obstacles you maim and you maul.

— Or if your name is Caleb – which in Hebrew means dog –
you just might choose to be like

Lassie or Rin Tin Tin or Clifford, the big red dog!

Question. How many of you would like to become a worm?

May I see a show of hands?

That’s just what I thought. None of you are worm wannabes!

Now, I don’t blame you.

Worms have no arms, no legs and no eyes!

They’re small and insignificant and, if you ask me,
worms don’t have the best of personalities!

No one ever stops their car and says, “*Hey everyone, take a look at that worm!*”

Or when did you read an editorial that passionately argued,

“We must cease the ongoing genocidal atrocity

taking place in our lakes and rivers! Worms deserve better!

*These cute creatures should not be skewered on hooks,
just so they can be fed to the fish!”*

[*Text*] Isaiah 41:14, “***Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob.***”

Why does Yahweh call the exiles in Babylon a worm?

Didn’t he get the memo that worm theology
isn’t the way to boost self-esteem

or encourage people to get up and get going?

Buried under the boot of Babylon, in Isaiah 40-55 the exiles are also called
— weak and weary — bruised reeds and smoldering wicks
— deaf and blind — childless, widowed, divorced
— and a stubborn rebel from birth

And God has a word for that – WORM.

The parallel thought in our text equates

“O worm Jacob” with “O dead ones of Israel.”

So Isaiah’s poetic parallelism

invites us to compare dead people with worms.

What a prophet!

Let’s think about this...

Dead people are buried; so are worms.

Dead people are stepped on; so are worms.

Dead people are surrounded by dirt; so are worms.

Dead people are ignored and soon forgotten; and so are the worms.

The exiles had seen terror on every side.

The patriarchal and Davidic promises appeared to be null and void.

The captives are in a culture

where their most treasured narratives and liturgies

are being mocked, trivialized, or dismissed as being simply irrelevant.

Everything had been swallowed up by the beast called Babylon.

This hopelessness is epitomized in

Psalm 22:1, ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** And then
verse 6, ***“I am a worm and not a man.”***

[***And You***] Now, what should I think of myself when I am captive to sin
and so far away from the Father?

When I don’t ***“act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with my God”***?

When I’m not aflame with holiness and feel no compassion for the lost.

What am I to think of myself when I take no delight in the Word,
recoil from prayer,
harbor lustful thoughts and
pant for the praises of people?

What am I when I am mean-spirited, petty and vindictive?

And God has a word for that – WORM.

You see, that is the Law and
it does not boost your self-esteem or encourage you to get up and get going!

Feeling good and thinking highly of ourselves
has nothing to do with God's word.

Rather he longs for us to cry out
with Isaiah, "***I am a man of unclean lips,***" and
with Job, "***Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes,***" and
with Paul, "***O wretched man that I am,
who will deliver me from this body of death!***"

You see, only people who are dead and buried and surrounded by dirt cry
out for life and resurrection!

***"Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob, O dead ones of Israel, for I myself
will help you, declares Yahweh, your Restorer, the Holy One of Israel."***

[**God**] Yahweh, God is not

— some football coach trying to rally his team
to "***win one for the gipper.***"

— Nor is he some talk-show host who wants us to
feel warm and fuzzy all over.

— God is not some sentimental granddaddy
who helps those who help themselves.

No. No. ----- No. No. No.

He is "***your Restorer, the Holy One of Israel.***"

The word *go 'el* – best translated "your Restorer" / "your Redeemer"—
appears here in Isaiah 40-55 for the 1st time and will come 9 more
times in this section.

A *go 'el* is your next-of-kin-relative
who buys back your inheritance,
who frees you from slavery, and
who pays off your debt.

Whatever has gone bad your *go 'el* will make good.

Coupled with *go 'el* is the phrase – "the Holy One of Israel" – which appears
in the book of Isaiah 25 times and only 7 more times in the Old Testament.

He is, as the seraphim cry out, "***Holy, Holy, Holy.***" It means Yahweh is
completely set apart and different from everyone and everything else.

Isaiah couples your Restorer/Redeemer

- the completely immanent One – with the Holy One of Israel
- the completely transcendent One to announce that Yahweh alone is able to marshal every power in the universe for a single, loving, furious, relentless goal – to restore you!

[*Gospel*] You see, it's time to make the Gospel clear now.

Right men's breakfast group? First Law, now hear the Gospel.

In the fullness of time Yahweh became our next-of-kin-relative, *literally*.

And then he took another step. He became dirty, despised and dismissed.

But then he took another, almost incomprehensible step.

It was one for the ages.

Psalm 22:1, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*"

Or, in his native Aramaic language, **elwi elwi lema sabacqani**.

And then verse 6, "*I am a worm and not a man.*"

Here is Jesus, nailed to the tree, his body bent, broken and twisted.

Here is Jesus, "the Smallest One."

Here is Jesus, the one who is completely dead.

And God has a word for that – WORM.

But then there was ... an earthquake and an angel and
the stone was rolled away and
the announcement that continues to rock our world,
"He is not here, he is risen, just as he said!"

And because Jesus is alive, God's transforming word to us is exactly this:

Isaiah 41:15, "*See, I am making you into a threshing sledge, new and sharp, with many teeth. You will thresh the mountains and crush them, and reduce the hills to chaff.*"

[*Conclusion*]

Worms become mountain movers!

The lowly and despised are loved and lifted up.

**"The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear,
the dead are raised, and the gospel is preached to the poor."**

God has a word for that. Gospel – Good News!

All because of His grace, mercy and peace – FOR YOU! Amen!

You are the body of Christ, each one of you part of it. Amen!