

Isaiah 48:20a

“Get Out”

3rd Sunday af. Epiphany

January 25, 2015

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Rev. Brent Hartwig

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

[**Introduction**] Susanna Petroysan heard her daughter cry out,
 “Mommy, I’m thirsty. I want a drink.”

She and four-year-old daughter were stuck in a basement
beneath tons of collapsed concrete and steel.

It was December 7, 1988 and an earthquake in Armenia
had just killed 55,000 people.

*“Mommy, I’m **so** thirsty. I want a drink.”*

After feeling around in the darkness of their basement Susanna found some shattered glass. She used it to slash her left hand and then gave it to her daughter to suck her blood.

Days passed. Susanna had no idea how many times she cut her hands.

She only knew that if she stopped her daughter would die.

Hands were cut, blood was shed and the child was saved.

[**Basement Babylon**]

In 587 BC Israel’s world caved in.

The temple collapsed, the monarchy lay in ruins,

the land became a wasteland and all hope was dismantled and destroyed.

Then a massive aftershock brought further wreckage and ruin.

Seven hundred miles from home,

Israel’s exiles became trapped in a basement called Babylon.

And with every passing year,

the Babylonian god Marduk seemed more and more powerful,

while Yahweh seemed more and more incidental.

Slowly but surely the exiles began to accommodate themselves
to their new surroundings.

Economic documents unearthed by the Tigris River

show that assimilating with Babylon brought stunning financial success.

Give in a little. You don’t have to change everything. Just be tolerant.

It was the whole boiling frog syndrome.

You know, myth has it – that if a frog is placed in hot water, it will jump out,

but if it is placed in lukewarm water that is gradually heated,
it will never get out, but slowly die.

The exiles are calling their Babylonian basement the new normal.

They are in hot water! If they don't get out soon, they will die!

[Isaiah's Charge]

Isaiah's charge, therefore, is to do everything possible to awaken Israel out of this spiritual slumber and get them out of Babylon.

So he announces that:

- Yahweh ***“will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations.”***
- His ***“glory will be revealed and all flesh will see it together.”***
- Rest assured, says Isaiah, that ***“those who wait on Yahweh will renew their strength,”*** for ***“a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.”*** And in 51:17, and then again in 52:1 he cries out, ***“Awake, awake!”***
- The climax of this preaching comes in Isaiah 48:20, ***“Get out of Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare it with a shout of joy.”***

And Israel's response? Nothing ... nothing!

They wouldn't leave!

The lights of Babylon,
the sounds of Babylon,
the religion of Babylon

coaxed most of them into staying ... in *Babylon*!

That's why throughout Isaiah 48 the prophet calls them, and I quote,

***“stubborn ... unyielding ... headstrong ...
prone to idolatry ... deaf ... deceptive ...
and a stubborn rebel from birth.”***

All this because Israel refused to listen to the gospel of their salvation;

– ***“Listen”***—***“Hear, O Israel”*** – This is the governing verb of the chapter.

It appears eleven times in Isaiah 48.

Can't you just imagine the people responding to the prophet? ***“Isaiah, haven't you heard? Babylon is the political-military-religious superpower of the day. This is the land of life, liberty and the purchase of happiness! Why should we go back to little back-water Judah? Besides, what a huge hassle it would be to liquidate our***

assets, pack our bags, and pull up stakes ... just to live in a land devastated by famine and warfare. Get out of Babylon? Isaiah, have you lost your mind?"

This is like:

- a thirsty person choosing to drink raw sewage instead of water from a mountain stream,
- or a bankrupt company rejecting a government bailout,
- or a student saying he doesn't want an automatic "A" from a teacher!

The exiles are unmoved by Isaiah's poetic claims,

alarming narrative and
stunning doxologies.

Our bondage began with just one more drink,
one more lie,
one more fling,
one more glance.

But one more always longs for one more,
and then ... just one more.

I know, oh God, I know.

And then a massive earthquake hits and in its aftershocks
we find ourselves trapped in a basement called Babylon.

What next?

The boiling frog syndrome unleashes its hypnotic power!

Sure, being obsessed with pornography, homosexuality, sex with benefits,
living together before married, money, gossip,
food, people's approval or work is a strange place to be in, at first.
It's crushing to be trapped beneath tons of collapsed hopes and shattered dreams.

But in time we become accustomed to living in destruction and death.

With each passing day it becomes easier to deny that I am stuck on stuff...
stuck on this stuff that kills and steals and destroys.

We are in hot water!

Hear the word of Yahweh,

"Get out of Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare it with a shout of joy."

It's in Yahweh's heart to call people out of darkness and into his marvelous light.

- He called Abram and Sarai to get out of Haran because it was the center of moon worship.
- He urged Lot and his family to get out of Sodom and Gomorrah because it was the center of sexual perversion.

— And he called Israel to get out of Egypt because it was the epicenter of a socialization that brought about massive dehumanization.
You see, at the core of Israel's narrative is Yahweh's ongoing call for his people.
A call to get out of decay, decadence and death.
And our response?
Too often ... nothing!

We don't— we don't listen to the gospel of our salvation. Isaiah 30:10-11 is the classic response to the prophetic call. ***“Speak to us smooth things, prophecy illusions; stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!”***

But deep down we're thirsty.
Not for more of the same.
We know its salt water in the desert. It doesn't quench – it kills.

We are thirsty. We're thirsty for a clean conscience,
for a fresh start,
for a loving,
for a tender hand to reach into our basement and get us out.

[***Servant Jesus***]

Well, that's exactly what Yahweh says to his Israel.
You see, Isaiah 40-55 is chalked-full of good news!
Consider these words from Isaiah 43.

“I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine.” “You are precious and honored in my sight and I love you.” “I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist.”

These great and precious promises are found, fulfilled and come to fruition
in Isaiah's Servant who alone is able to reach into our wreckage,
and he does it with hands laced with blood.

Finally, you see, blood was all Jesus had.
His disciples had deserted him.
His garments had been gambled away.
Even his Father had turned his back.
Blood was all he had, but the blood of Jesus is all we need.
***“What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!”***
Hands were cut, blood was shed, and we are saved.

And our response?

We get out of Babylon, we flee Chaldea and we declare it with this shout of joy! Amen!
Now you are the body of Christ, each one of you part of it! Amen!