

Isaiah 61:1-3, 10-11

“A People Mover”

4th Sunday af. Epiphany

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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**] I don’t fly often, but this I know! Today’s airports are deadly. Pick your poison – DFW, Chicago O’Hare, Washington Dulles, LAX.

These places don’t have gates they have graves.

And it is a death march when you have to catch a connecting flight!

Most of us know the feeling.

We’re trying to make a connecting flight,

find the “You Are Here” sign – gate 65 –

and begin looking for the gate of our next flight – 495!

As we realize where we are, as opposed to where we need to be,

we mutter something like, “I’m not gonna make it! I’m stuck!”

But with no other options we take a deep breath,

grip our suitcase in one hand and our “fun” bag in the other

and set out for, what, by conservative estimates, will be a three-day hike!

Then, there, up ahead, we see it.

“Could it be? Is it a bird? A plane? Superman?” Better.

As we get closer

our face lights up like a night on the Fourth of July.

Our heart soars.

For there in the distance is a people mover!

A people mover is the Yellow Brick Road of the airport.

It’s the last draft of the proposal.

It’s the last test of the last class of the last day of High School.

A people mover is a horizontal escalator, a moveable sidewalk.

While we catch our breath, it carries our body.

While we take one step, we gain two.

What we thought would take 40 minutes, now only takes 10.

And what a difference it makes!

Deep sighs – dismissed. The fatigue – forgotten. The gallop – gone!
Now, maybe I’m overstating my point about airports.
But I could never, ever overstate the power of a people mover.

[*Stuck in Babylon*] We might be stuck in an airport, but...
the people addressed in our text are stuck in Babylon,
with its canals and ziggurats,
its Tigris and Euphrates Rivers,
its figures of dragons and lions on the Ishtar Gate and
its detestable statue of Marduk.

Judah and Jerusalem and the Jordan have been replaced
by the building projects of Nebuchadnezzar.

You see...Israel has no king, no royal city, no land,
no temple, no liturgy, no sacrifice,
no hope and no future.

By the rivers of Babylon they sit and weep (cf. Ps 137:1)
reminiscing about the good ol’ days
when they worshipped in the splendor of Solomon’s temple,
worked and shopped in the city of David and
saw the Mount of Olives from a distance.

They are permanently exiled – not in DFW – but in a foreign land.

[*Hammer*]
There is a game at places like Chucky Cheeses and arcades called Whack-A-Mole.
The contestant gets a hammer and then tries to, well, whack a mole.
When the mole comes up for the hole, you hit it!
No need for advance education to succeed at this,
only the thrill for **boom, boom, boom!**

The people of our text had felt the hammer of God’s judgment.
Because of their persistent pride, inflated egos, worship of false gods
– and the list could go on and on, and on –
in the sixth century B.C. God sent the Babylonians
as his hammer to smash them to smithereens.

Some of their relatives had been murdered.
The entire country had been mocked.
Babylon, sent as God's agent of judgment to mame and maul,
went boom, boom, boom!

[**We Know**] We know the feeling all too well.
Because of bad decisions, barbed words, embattled relationships
– and the list could go on and on ... and on –
we also know the just judgment of our God.

The Ten Commandments are his hammer of judgment; boom, boom, boom!
And under the Law we feel trapped and locked
in a life of darkness and despair and depression.
There's a part of us that says, "I'm stuck, big time."

But look, up ahead. Can it be? Is it a bird, a plane, Superman? Infinitely better!
We have a People Mover – a Servant, a Messiah –
and his name is Jesus the Nazarene.

[**First Sermon**]

Luke records our Lord's first sermon in chapter four of his gospel: "***The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and the recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.***"

Then, to the shock of all,
Jesus says, "***Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.***" (Luke 4:21)

Fulfilled –that is a perfect verb and guys in my Greek class you are going to love this, that indicates present and ongoing results.

Meaning that the Jubilee
– announced by Isaiah, begun in Nazareth
– ongoing throughout Luke's gospel, is still going on today!

To a dead son in the village of Nain he says, "***Young man, I say to you, get up!***"

To a sinful woman at the house of Simon the Pharisee he says,
"Your sins are forgiven."

To a woman with a flow of blood for eighteen years, "***Your faith has healed you.***"

To Zacchaeus, "***Today salvation has come to this house.***"

To Jarius' daughter, ***“taliqa koum!”***

To the disciples, ***“Have no fear.”***

To the starved, the famished, the empty, ***“Come, for everything is now ready.”***

To the Romans who scourged him, spit on him and spiked him,
he says over and over again,

“Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”

And to every one of us

he will one day announce with a loving gleam in his eye

“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise!”

Oh... Don't you know?

We have a People Mover – a Servant, a Messiah –
and his name is Jesus the Nazarene.

In the baptismal flood Jesus moves us from hell to heaven

In the Eucharistic body and blood He moves us from full to overflowing

In the absolution we are told again and again and again

– that we have been moved from death to life.

And that life is forgiven and free and forever!

[***Conclusion***]

Beginning with Israel in exile,

down through the ages,

we are moved to say –

“I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, ...”

What, then, shall we say in response to all of this?

We have a People Mover – a Servant, a Messiah –
and his name is Jesus the Nazarene.

And that.... is nothing short of revolutionary and life-changing!

“Exactly,” says Isaiah.

“Because I love you,” says Jesus! Amen.

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