

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

1 Timothy 1:2 ...Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

My sermon today is based on our Old Testament lesson – Isaiah 35:3-10

“Reconstructive Surgery”

There’s nothing like a vigorous walk early in the morning. If you can force yourself out of bed and start walking, sluggishness will evaporate and it will be replaced by an energy you didn’t know you had while you were laying in bed. After a half hour of walking, you wonder why you don’t go for a walk everyday.

That is unless you are not healthy enough to walk. For people who can’t walk, it is one of those simple pleasures that they long for but may not experience again in this life.

For people in this condition, our Old Testament lesson offers hope. Isaiah presents us with a vision of heaven. There God will strengthen the weak. He will make the fearful brave. He will make the blind to see and the lame to leap like deer.

The more time I spend reading Scripture, the more I am convinced that heaven will not be like it is portrayed on TV. We won’t be floating on clouds. We won’t be making annoying harp sounds.

In today’s Old Testament lesson, God gives Isaiah a preview of heaven and we can learn a little about what heaven will be like from it. One thing that I notice about the Biblical view of heaven is that it has both urban and rural elements. It is the best of both worlds: country and city.

The first glimpse of heaven that we have in the Bible is in Genesis chapter two. There we have the Garden of Eden. It is lush, watered by four rivers and full of towering trees. Adam and Eve are gardeners and biologists. They are asked to name the animals and cultivate the plants. This is definitely a country scene.

The last glimpse of heaven that Scripture gives us is urban. Heaven is described as the New Jerusalem, the holy city. It has four outer walls and twelve gates. The walls and the gates are decorated with beautiful stones and each of the twelve gates are made of giant pearls.

Yet there is still a little bit of nature running through the city. At its very center is a river. Growing on both sides of the river is the tree of life. It is the same tree that God removed from the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve could eat from it. Once in heaven, God's people will be given the privilege to eat from it.

So both urban and rural elements are combined in the image of heaven in Revelation. Today's passage from Isaiah hints at the urban and rural nature of heaven too. Isaiah describes a desert landscape that is suddenly transformed into a vibrant, living landscape. Pools spring from the ground and land that was barren begins to teem with life.

But in the middle of this country paradise there is a highway. It is an urban intrusion in an otherwise pastoral scene. A highway is a road built on a raised platform. It is not something that develops naturally like a cow trail. It is the product of intelligent engineering.

Where does this highway go? Unfortunately, Isaiah does not tell us. I like to think that it leads to the New Jerusalem but the text doesn't say that.

Isaiah is more concerned with *who* goes on the highway than *where* it goes. The name of the highway is the Way of Holiness. That gives us a hint at who can travel on it. The next line makes this clear, “the unclean shall not pass over it.” This is a road for saints only. (This must be where “The Saints Go Marching In”.)

So what hope do we have of being able to pass on that road? None of us are clean in a spiritual sense and the text says, “the unclean shall not pass over it.”

We can find hope in the promise given in verse four, “He (God) will come and save you.” God has come to save us. He took on human flesh and he went to the cross to purge us from the filth that separates us from God. By walking the Way of Sorrows, Christ opened the Way of Holiness for us. Because of Christ’s dirty cross, we are made clean.

As Christians, we should live our lives here on earth as though we are living in a shadow world. The real world is yet to come. The joys of earth will be magnified in heaven. The sorrows of earth will be eliminated.

God will perform reconstructive surgery on each of us. He will make our weak hands strong, our feeble knees firm, our anxious hearts bold, our mute tongues to sing with joy. The least in the Kingdom of Heaven will be greater than the greatest person on earth today.

These are the miraculous promises that our God leaves ringing in our ears.

May the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians. 4:7)