

Good News Daily

Volume XXI

January 31-February 6, 2021

Number 5

Sunday, January 31

Isaiah 51:9-16 *“I am the one who comforts you. So why should you be afraid Have you forgotten the LORD who made you, who stretched out the skies and made the earth? Why are you always afraid ...?”* (vv.12-13 NCV)

As I write in the summer of 2020, billions around the world are afraid. The coronavirus still rages across the globe killing hundreds of thousands, filling us with anxiety about our health and wellbeing. Violent protests have broken out in the United States and other countries, causing injuries to people and the destruction of property. Far too many remain unemployed or under-employed. They can't pay their bills, feed their children, or get medical care. A national election looms over us, with sharp divisions in both major political parties that lead to aggressive arguments on Capitol Hill as well as in one-on-one conversations with voters who disagree passionately and fear the outcome.

This is why God's words in today's reading from Isaiah especially resonated with me. They helped calm my own nerves about the state of the nation and the planet. The Lord *does* comfort us with Christ's precious peace. And, as God reminded Job—who had lost much and was in despair—He made everything and is still in charge. Let's all try to remember that, this week.

Psalms 24, 29; Hebrews 11:8-16; John 7:14-31

Monday, February 1

Galatians 4:1-11 *So now you are not a slave; you are God's child, and God will give you the blessing he promised, because you are his child.* (v.7)

More comforting words from God. Paul tells us in verse 3b, “we were once ... slaves to the useless rules of this world.” But through Christ's sacrificial death for our sins, God has freed (or ransomed) each of us to become His child, just as Jesus is. As an only child, I like having many “sisters and brothers” in the faith community of which I am privileged to be a member.

If we are God's children, then won't our Heavenly Father ensure that we are taken care of, helped, protected, and healed? Perhaps not in exactly the ways we expect, but decent parents always try to do what's best for their kids. How much more will God give us His blessings, as this verse from Galatians proclaims. It might help improve our mindset, if each of us who believes in Christ thought of ourselves as his brother or sister, and all of us as God's children, loved beyond what we can ask of imagine. I'll try to remember that, this week.

Isaiah 51:17-23; Psalms 56, 57, 58; Mark 7:24-37

Tuesday, February 2

Psalms 61 *God, hear my cry; listen to my prayer. I call to you from the ends of the earth when I am afraid. Carry me away to a high mountain. You have been my protection, like a strong tower against my enemies.* (vv.1-3)

Lately, I've had trouble sleeping at night. I wake up way too early in the morning while it's still dark and lie there thinking about, worrying over, wondering at, and questioning, far too many things. Being a Christian doesn't mean we won't feel anxious, or even depressed, at times. Some of the greatest spiritual heroes of our faith (e.g., St. Paul of Tarsus, St. John of the Cross, St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta) all experienced a “dark night of the soul” at some point in their mission and ministry. Sometimes, all we can do is pray the words of the psalmist: “God, hear my cry; listen to my prayer.” And then, we need to remember—and trust—that He *has* been our protection and has carried us thus far.

Starting to pray often helps me get back to sleep. And I don't think God minds if I fail to finish what I started. He cares that we get our rest. So, this week, rest in the Lord whenever you need to.

Isaiah 52:1-12; Psalm 62; Galatians 4:12-20; Mark 8:1-10

Wednesday, February 3

Mark 8:11-26 *Jesus sighed deeply and said, “Why do you people ask for a miracle as a sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to you.”* (v.12)

We read this verse and feel like yelling, “What’s wrong with those people?” In the gospel passage immediately preceding, Jesus fed more than 5,000 people miraculously. Moreover, he’s been healing the sick, restoring the handicapped, raising the dead, even turning ordinary water into the finest wine! Aren’t these sufficient “signs” that Christ is truly the Messiah?

Ah, but are we any different? At times, our faith is so weakened or trampled down by circumstances (such as life in 2020). We, too, yearn for dramatic signs from God. *If only* [this or that would happen], we say, it would boost my faith. Well, sometimes, God is kind enough to oblige. Due to the pandemic, my husband was temporarily laid off. Yet, he was denied unemployment compensation because of his part-time job as our church’s organist. He appealed, and for weeks heard nothing. Then he checked our bank account, and I heard him exclaim: “\$500 was deposited from who-knows-where—but it’s marked ‘UC.’” He was suspicious, but I replied: “That’s an answer to prayer!” Thank you, Lord, for that sign!

Isaiah 54:1-17; Psalm 72; Galatians 4:21-31

Thursday, February 4

Galatians 5:1-15 *If you try to be made right with God through the law, your life with Christ is over—you have left God’s grace. But we have the true hope that comes from being made right with God, and by the Spirit we wait eagerly for this hope.* (vv.4-5)

We’ve all heard of “DIY”—do-it-yourself—TV shows about fixer-uppers, or kits to build something without professional expertise. I’ve always tended to be a “DIY person.” Growing up as the only child of a single mother, I took on more responsibility than most children, and was also born with a “Type A” personality and an above-normal IQ. All of this made me think, as a teenager and young adult, that I could do anything—and I didn’t want or need anyone else’s help.

Then in my early 30’s, my self-constructed life fell apart completely, and beyond what any well-meaning friend or professional counselor could do for me, I needed major assistance! God graciously encountered me in the balcony of the church I was attending, and during Communion one Sunday, He changed me from a miserable DIY failure to a joy-filled WWJD believer.

Now that I’ve been a re-born Christian and a pastor for over 30 years, I read these verses and their truth resonates deeply. We can’t have DIY salvation—only God can do that for us!

Isaiah 55:1-13; Psalms 70, 71; Mark 8:27—9:1

Friday, February 5

Psalm 69 *LORD, answer me because your love is so good. Because of your great kindness, turn to me. Do not hide from me, your servant. I am in trouble. Hurry to help me!* (vv.16-17)

What jumped out at me in these verses were the phrases, “because your love is so good,” and “because of your great kindness,” describing why God will answer the psalmist’s desperate plea. Not because the pray-er deserves God’s help. But because the Lord loves His children who cry out to Him in need, with faith and trust.

Looking back over the 26 years my husband and I have been married, I realize that often we have done things for each other, or helped one another, simply out of love or kindness, not because either of us deserved it. When we, as Christians, do this for anyone—not for what we can get out of it, or expecting anything in return—we are caring for others as God does.

This weekend, if you find yourself in any kind of trouble, or need help, remember God’s love that “is so good,” and His “great kindness.” Talk to Him, and He will “hurry to help.” Thank you, Lord!

Isaiah 56:1-8; Galatians 5:16-24; Mark 9:2-13

Saturday, February 6

Psalm 75 *God, we thank you; we thank you because you are near. We tell about the miracles you do. I will tell about this forever; I will sing praise to the God of Jacob.* (vv.1, 9)

I never tire of sharing how Jesus rescued me—from myself, death, and hell. Therefore, I will sing praise to God forever, and I try to do that even when I don't *feel* joyful or thankful. I could not have survived the challenges of 2020 without believing God was near, as well as trusting the Lord to bring good things out of all the suffering and the abnormal “new normal” (a term I’ve come to despise).

For instance, as I write, our church has been closed for five months. We missed much of Lent, all of Holy Week and Easter, and the season after Pentecost. But the weekly services we record and post on three social media platforms are reaching *triple* our parish’s average Sunday attendance. Online viewers number people around the world. What an opportunity to preach the gospel! And for our small country parish to become known. We hope and pray that some who’ve been worshiping virtually will attend when we re-open. Meanwhile, we continue to share the Good News and sing praise to God “because He is near.”

Isaiah 57:3-13; Psalm 76; Galatians 5:25—6:10; Mark 9:14-29

by Nina George-Hacker

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