

“Repairers, Restorers, Drillers, And Butterflies.”

A Sermon on Isaiah 58:1-12, Luke 4:16-21 & the Fifth Great End of the Church: the Promotion of Social Righteousness
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From yesterday’s *New York Times*:

“It was a moment of euphoria.

At 8:05 a.m. Saturday, more than two agonizing months after 33 miners were trapped nearly half a mile beneath the earth, a powerful drill fitted with pneumatic hammers pounded through the last feet of volcanic rock to reach their underground prison.

In the chilly desert above, a temporary village of rescue workers and family members [named Camp Hope] erupted in cheers” and celebration.

Said Juan Sánchez, father of one of the miners trapped below, “There have been hard moments, beautiful moments, sad moments, moments filled with happiness, nights where we were cold here, “But we just kept going, trusting in God that this would all work out. Right now all I feel is happiness; it’s like a calm has come over us.”¹

A calm has come over us. That calm is the kind of peace that comes with being set free. In this case, it is the calm that comes even with hints of a coming liberation that all are working for.

Can you imagine what it must be like for those miners down there? The mine collapsed on the fifth of August, and the miners found themselves trapped underneath 2300 ft of rock. That’s more than seven football fields deep. They spent most of these months in the “Refuge 33” shelter that is 538 square feet, the size of a cozy studio apartment. It was eighteen days before the first four inch borehole would reach them. They survived on canned fish and a jar of peaches.² Can you imagine what the waiting is like, there in the stifling darkness and stuffiness of that mine?

Yesterday, with the breakthrough of the drill, the miners received another sign rescue, and freedom was on the way. How important those signs of rescue, those harbingers of liberation and safety are for those who are trapped. We can celebrate this morning with the miners, and their families, and all of the engineers and experts from around the world that have gathered in the rescue effort.

WILL WE DIG DEEP?
WILL WE DRILL DOWN TO
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WORLD BURIES?

But this morning, here in this place, we hear the word of the prophet Isaiah. We look around us and know that those thirty three miners in Chile are not the only ones in the world who remain buried. Isaiah, in that subtle, restrained way of the prophets (the prophets are always subtle and restrained right?), directs our attention without mercy on those who are buried deep by oppression and injustice.

In this portion of the book, Isaiah’s word from the Lord is addressed to exiles who have returned from Babylon and are rebuilding their homes, their nation, their faith, and their life. They are starting again. In the verses that we heard, we find that there are those who are wondering where God is as they rebuild their lives. They do everything that they think they are supposed to do. They perform all of the right rituals that are supposed to evoke God’s presence. They delight to draw to God. They say, “Praise The Lord!” a lot and talk about morality and justice in God’s eyes; but something is wrong. God doesn’t seem to be listening. The prophet delivers a word that tells them why.

While they are praising God, they are looking after themselves. While they are performing all of the right rituals, they are oppressing those on the margins of their society. While they pray and fast, they are quarreling and pointing fingers and hiding from those in need. The Lord replies, “And you’re wondering why I am not answering?”

This text points to what I believe is a fundamental truth of the gospel. We come here because we are concerned about the relationship between ourselves and God (a vertical relationship), and God says that this vertical relationship is inexorably tied to our horizontal relationships, the relationship between us, between you and me and our neighbor. If we are ignoring those the world buries, says the word of the Lord in Isaiah, we can’t expect our relationship with the God who loves them to be right. If you want to celebrate and enjoy my presence, then you need to be present with and for the hungry, the naked, the oppressed.

In that sermon we heard from Jesus in Luke’s gospel, we find that Jesus points our attention in the same direction: bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and letting the oppressed go free. That’s what Jesus’ ministry is all about.

This brings us to fifth great end of the church: the promotion of social righteousness.³ At the heart of the gospel, and at the center of what it means to be church, is the invitation,

the call, the spiritual nudge to look at the world, to see where injustice holds sway, and to do something about it.

As we look at our world, we know that there are many suffocating and suffering, buried perhaps not by literal rocks, but with figurative rocks that weigh just as heavy, are just as hard to break through, that stifle and suffocate just as much as that hard volcanic rock that stands between those miners and freedom.

The inequality gap between the rich and the poor is growing at an alarming rate over the last few decades.⁴ More and more are struggling on a downward income spiral while those at the very top are heading northward. The vast majority of those who are on the lower portions of the economic ladder are not looking for freebees, they are working harder and harder for less and less. What are we going to do about *our* oppressed workers? What is the fast that the Lord would have us choose?

A few chapters earlier in Isaiah, the word of the Lord speaks out on behalf of the foreigner and the eunich (see Is. 56). God lifts up the 1) immigrant, and 2) the ones whose sexuality and cultural practices are outside of the mainstream (two examples of those so easily buried by the rest of us). In that chapter, God wraps God’s arms around them and says to the ancient nation builders you must do the same. How things change/how they stay the same.

We are even now discussing legislation on immigration. Will we, as people of God, advocate and work to welcome the foreigner seeking the same blessings of life we enjoy (we have a symposium coming up to discuss just that).

Recently, Apostle Boyd Packer, during the LDS General Conference, spoke words that buried our Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered sisters and brothers. His message lumped them together with pornographers and those who harm and exploit, a connection I reject. I believe that our GLBT sisters and brothers are merely seeking to live life as God created them to live it. (The word I speak is against that particular stance of the LDS church and not the faith of the LDS church. I speak humbly, because I know that there are plenty Brother Packers who are sitting in Presbyterian pews).

The question remains, what shall we do for these the world marginalizes? Susan Springer, rector of St Johns, wrote a bold and clear statement on behalf of those marginalized by their sexuality.⁵ She spoke of love and inclusiveness. Will we stand with her?

Will we create a safe and welcoming place for the worker, for the immigrant, for those whose sexuality differs from the traditional? Will we work for equality and freedom? What about the one buried in the room in the far corner of the nursing home? What about the battered spouse and her or his children? What about the single parent who has more responsibilities and things to do than hours to do them in?

I know that this is hard. It convicts me, certainly, and I ask for grace. But we *also* ask for strength, not to earn our salvation (Jesus has already taken care of that), but to grow, and bring light to all God’s children.

There is good news. If Isaiah tells us that there is something broken when our relationships are unjust, the Word of the Lord also tells us that there is something repaired when we work to make things right. We can be known as repairers of the breach. We can restore our streets so that all can live freely in them, and in so doing our light will rise. It’s possible to change and bring change. This is what the fifth great end is about. We gain strength from each other.

I know there some of us gathered here believe differently about specific issues. At the very least, let’s talk about these differences. Let’s talk about what our responses should be. Let us talk about what we should be doing, what we should be advocating for, who Jesus would be reaching out to, who Jesus would be freeing today if he were here.

But what am I saying, *he is here*. He has, oh, about 120 pairs of hands and feet this morning. He has about 120 voices invited to say, “Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

There is an interesting addendum to the story of the Chilean miners. On the day of the collapse, as two miners were driving down into the mine, the rocks began to fall. As the mine was collapsing around them, they noticed a white butterfly. It was the kind of butterfly that flits around flowers that briefly bloom up on top, but this was 500 meters below the surface. As the slowed down to look at this butterfly, rocks came crashing down in front of them. The butterfly guided them to safety.⁶

I don’t know. Do you believe it? Do you believe it’s possible?

In all of these banners representing the six Great Ends of Church the Spirit of God is represented by a dove. It’s a traditional symbol rooted in Scripture. But this morning, God’s Spirit takes the form of a butterfly. It’s flitting around the sanctuary this morning. Do you

believe it? It’s guiding us to justice, and peace, guiding us to repair the breaches between us, and to restore our streets for all gods children. Ahead of us hard moments, beautiful moments, sad moments, moments filled with happiness, nights that will be cold. As sure as the sun rises, so does the light of gods love mercy and strength. Amen.

¹ “Drill Reaches Miners in Chile, but Risks Remain,” By ALEXEI BARRIONUEVO and CHRISTINE HAUSER, *New York Times*, Saturday, October 9, 2010 <http://goo.gl/4JH7>

² “Down below, Chilean miners found hope in family, the little things” By Elliott C. McLaughlin, CNN, October 9, 2010 11:14 a.m. EDT, <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/americas/10/09/chile.miners.rescue.nears/index.html?hpt=C2#>

³ We are moving through the 6 “Great Ends [or purposes/goals] of the Church” contained in the Constitution of our denomination.

⁴ See *The United States of Inequality: Trying to understand income inequality, the most profound change in American society in your lifetime.* By Timothy Noah, *Slate.com*, <http://www.slate.com/id/2267157>

⁵ “Episcopalians don't share LDS view on homosexuality” The Rev. Susan W. Springer, *Herald Journal*, Friday, October 8, 2010, http://news.hjnews.com/opinion/columns/article_2ecf3908-d271-11df-b99f-001cc4c03286.html

⁶ “Did a butterfly save two miners' lives in Chile?” By Karl Penhaul, CNN, September 27, 2010, http://articles.cnn.com/2010-09-27/world/chile.miner.butterfly_1_white-butterfly-fellow-miners-cave-ins?_s=PM:WORLD