

February 8, 2015

### **Isaiah 40**

**21** Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? **22** He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. **23** He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. **24** No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. **25** "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. **26** Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. **27** Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"? **28** Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. **29** He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. **30** Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; **31** but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

### **Psalms 147**

**1** Praise the LORD. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him! **2** The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel. **3** He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. **4** He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. **5** Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit. **6** The LORD sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground. **7** Sing to the LORD with grateful praise; make music to our God on the harp. **8** He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills. **9** He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call. **10** His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the power of human legs; **11** the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love. **12** Extol the LORD, Jerusalem; praise your God, Zion. **13** He strengthens the bars of your gates and blesses your people within you. **14** He grants peace to your borders and satisfies you with the finest of wheat. **15** He sends his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly. **16** He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes. **17** He hurls down his hail like pebbles. Who can withstand his icy blast? **18** He sends his word and melts them; he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow. **19** He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. **20** He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws. Praise the LORD.

### **1 Corinthians 9**

**16** For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! **17** If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. **18** What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not misuse my rights as a preacher of the gospel. **19** Though I am free and belong to no

one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. **20** To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. **21** To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. **22** To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. **23** I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

### **Mark 1:29-39**

**29** As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. **30** Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. **31** So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. **32** That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. **33** The whole town gathered at the door, **34** and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was. **35** Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. **36** Simon and his companions went to look for him, **37** and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" **38** Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else--to the nearby villages--so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." **39** So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

## Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, God's Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Sometimes we just need to get lost in the poetry. Over the past several months, most of our sermons considered what the future could be like for us, what discipleship should be like for us, what mission might be like for us, what God has in store for us. And don't worry, this will continue. As a church on the cusp of a new beginning, as a people discerning our new identity in Christ Jesus at Christ Lutheran Church, we need these kind of conversations, these kind of hard looks at who we are and who God is calling us to be. But spend too much time in the detail work and we may forget the majesty of our God. Sometimes we just need to get lost in the poetry.

What would God be without the poetry? Who would we worship without that beautiful complex mystery? Jeremy Taylor, a 17<sup>th</sup> century pastor and poet in the Church of England, once quipped, "A religion without mystery surely must be a religion without God." How true! How beautiful! We must, at some point, hold fast to the mystery of God. We know so much about who God is because of the revelation of the divine in Jesus Christ, that God is a god of relationship and community, so much so that God becomes human. We know so much about what God does because, on the cross and in the empty tomb, we find the love of God that refuses to let death have the last word over our lives, that God is a god of forgiveness and love, even to the extent of self sacrifice. We

know so much about who God calls us to be because, through the Holy Spirit, God calls us to actions of justice and mercy, that God is the god of all creation, seeking the reconciliation of all things. We know so much about God, and so, sometimes, we forget the vitality of mystery, that, as Taylor says, without mystery, we have no God.

Let's ask the question in a different way then. What would the beach be without the ocean? A desert, dry and parched? Perhaps. But with the constant return of water, with the sounds of the waves and life in the seas, it appears as if, only for a moment, heaven and earth meet to play.

What would the Mona Lisa be without that hint of a smile? A woman somber and secluded in muted colors? Perhaps. But the mystery of that smile lights up the face, the painting, and aspiring artists across time and space.

What would life on earth be without the space beyond? Self centered and yet incredibly limited? Perhaps. But the expansive, expanding universe around us reminds us of God's careful attention to the details of human life as well as God's expansive creation of stars and planets and so many things as yet unknown.

God without mystery is the beach without the ocean, the unsmiling Mona Lisa, earth all alone, and so much more. Mystery is at the core of God's identity, not because God hides from us, but because God's fullness is simply so much greater than our conceptions. God is a question without answer, a mystery without solution, not because God remains far off, but because God's greatness

and goodness is simply too much for our limited perspective to grasp. In the incarnation, when God becomes human, we at once get a personal look at God's majesty in humble trappings, and yet our human eyes can only take in a meager portion of the fullness of God contained in Jesus Christ.

**Do you not know? Have you not heard?** This refrain is an invitation to get lost in the Lord, to swim in the significance of the Spirit, to dive deeply into the devotion of El Shaddai. This is an invitation to meditation. It is an invitation to get lost in the poetry. To love God's mystery, of God's majesty, is also to glimpse the depth of God's beauty.

We often think of mysteries in a Sherlock Holmes kind of way. We become obsessed with solving the mystery rather than appreciating the existence of something beyond ourselves. Now, of course we want Holmes and Watson to solve those crimes, but some mysteries are not meant to be solved or even understood. Rather, they're meant to be embraced, acknowledge, appreciated. God is this way. The mystery of God's identity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is beyond us, and yet something we take by faith as true. The mystery of precisely how God created all things that exist out of a formless void is beyond us, and yet something we take by faith as true. The mystery of Jesus' resurrection after three days in the grave is beyond us, and yet something we take by faith as true. How bread and wine somehow become for us the presence of Christ's body and blood is a mystery, and yet something we take by faith as true. Our Christian faith is not a set of directions to follow, but rather a

mystery to inhabit, to live in, so that the mystery might transform us into the image and likeness of God. Sometimes we just need to get lost in the poetry.

Now, when I say poetry, I mean more than just the words of Isaiah. I mean the artistry of the faith. One way to do that is to utilize icons to meditate upon God's mysteries. Our eastern orthodox sisters and brothers talk about icons as windows into the divine mysteries of heaven. That's why they clearly connect to the earth through the use of organic elements – there's no latex paint in true icons – and yet use angles and images that point far beyond our human experience.

Perhaps the best way to embrace this mystery is to use the words of Isaiah, those words that point to God's mystery, and use an icon to help guide our thoughts, our prayers, our struggles, and our thanksgiving with this mysterious God. This particular icon is of Jesus' resurrection, a mystery as complex as God's hanging of the stars in creation.\* To even deepen the mystery, we look at Christ's resurrection as an act of recreation, first of himself, then of humanity, then of all creation. In the resurrection of Christ, a new world as come. Even the stars will never again be the same.

We will read again Isaiah's words *slowly*. We'll allow each sentence some space to breathe, each aspect of God's mysterious activity some time to marinate within us. This may be a bit uncomfortable since this is a new practice, but I invite you to try this with me as an attempt to delve just a bit deeper into the mystery of God. At the end, we'll allow some time of silence in order settle

ourselves, to allow God's mystery to wash over us. Let's take some time to consider the wonderful mystery who is our God.

- + *Do you not know?*
- + *Have you not heard?*
- + *Has it not been told you from the beginning?*
- + *Have you not understood since the earth was founded?*
- + *God sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers.*
- + *God stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.*
- + *God brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.*
- + *No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.*
- + *"To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.*
- + *Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:*
- + *Who created all these?*
- + *It is God who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name.*
- + *Because of God's great power and mighty strength, not one of them is*
- + *Why do you complain, Jacob?*

- + *Why do you say, Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"?* .
- + *Do you not know?*
- + *Have you not heard?*
- + *The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.*
- + *God will not grow tired or weary, and God's understanding no one can fathom.*
- + *God gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.*
- + *Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;*
- + *but YOU who hope in the LORD will renew YOUR strength.*
- + *YOU will soar on wings like eagles;*
- + *YOU will run and not grow weary.*
- + *YOU will walk and not be faint.*

Sometimes we just need to get lost in the poetry. Amen.

\*Due to copyright restrictions, we cannot include the icon we used for guided meditation here. However, if you're reading this sermon devotionally, we encourage you to search for an icon that inspires you to help guide your own thoughts and prayers.