

Session 4: 3rd Isaiah

Welcome

As we gather one last time in our study of Isaiah, we remember the historical arc that this prophetic book covers.

1st Isaiah, between 742 – 700 BCE, challenged the rich and powerful to live as God intended, with a special focus on treatment of the poor, powerless, widows, orphans and immigrants. He called for complete trust in God, in the midst of the Assyrian invasion of the area. If the people and rulers failed to trust God, and failed to treat others justly, the nations would be conquered and go into exile. Not because God was weak, but because God was serious about how we lived!

2nd Isaiah, about 150 years later, announced the incredible good news that God had chosen Cyrus, a Persian, to be God's anointed one (=Messiah) to free God's people. He proclaimed that God was being faithful to God's covenant promises, but fulfilling them in a new way. No longer would they remember the first Exodus from Egypt! Instead they would celebrate the new Exodus from Babylon.

Today we meet 3rd Isaiah. He was part of the group that returned to Jerusalem in 538 BCE.

Opening Prayer

Ever present God, we confess that we often feel overwhelmed by the challenges facing us. Give us the will to trust you as we navigate uncharted waters of faith in this COVID world. Empower us to actually live as your saved people in the world. Amen.

Summary of 3rd Isaiah

3rd Isaiah reflects the tension between the vision of Israel proclaimed by 2nd Isaiah, of a people who have faithfully rebounded from the crushing experience of the Babylonian Exile, and the brutal reality of life in the promised land experienced by those who heeded 2nd Isaiah's call to join him in a new Exodus so glorious that they would forget the first Exodus.

Some of those returning Israelites rebounded by trying to recreate the past rather than leaning into the new creation proclaimed by 2nd Isaiah. As we know from the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah, most Israelites opted to restore at least a semblance of their past by rebuilding the temple, albeit on a much less impressive scale.

(If the group is interested in learning more about this, read Ezra 3. Note that the old people weep when they realize how much this new temple pales in comparison to Solomon's temple.)

3rd Isaiah contrasts true inner faithfulness with external temple rituals and says God is calling for the former rather than the latter!

What does that look like according to 3rd Isaiah? Read Isaiah 58:3-10.

Take a moment to compare these verses with Jesus' words recorded for us in Matthew 25:31-46.

This is actually nothing new. All the written prophets use these 5 categories as God's measuring stick: treatment of the poor, powerless, widows, orphans and the alien in our midst

= immigrants. If you haven't wandered down the garden path of "*Worship Prophetic Style*" yet, now might be a good time!

3rd Isaiah, like all of us, has to do 2 things at once. Be honest about the strength of the temptation/desire to go "back to the future" as well as proclaim the possibility that some will lean into God's yet to be revealed future.

This might be a great time to check out the ELCA's Life of Faith Initiative. Why? The focus of the initiative is on our baptismal vocation to serve God by serving our neighbors and God's amazing creation. For those who might ask..."Who is my neighbor?" read Luke 10:25-37. You will find information for your group here: <https://lifeoffaith.info/>

Meeting 3rd Isaiah

Once again there are multiple pathways through the garden.

- Show Janelle Thompson's picture "*Nations will come.*" Read Isaiah 66:18-23.
- Work through the selected passages listed at the end of session 3.
- Review "*Worship Prophetic Style*" to reinforce Isaiah's laser focus on justice issues.

Questions for Discussion

1. Compare the focus on justice across all of Isaiah. How might this focus help your congregation, and you personally, be faithful to your baptismal callings?
2. Like the time of the three Isaiahs, our time is filled with challenges and opportunities. How can the call to trust God of the three Isaiah's provide support and encouragement to you and your congregation as you navigate in these COVID waters?
3. 3rd Isaiah had to deal with many of his contemporaries who wanted to recreate the past upon their return from exile. How might his oracles help you and your congregation resist that same temptation?
4. What is one thing that you will do, rather than doing nothing, now that you've studied the book of Isaiah?

Closing Prayer (Taken from ELW)

Lord God,
You have called your servants to ventures
of which we cannot see the ending,
by paths as yet untrodden,
through perils unknown.
Give us faith to go out with good courage,
not knowing where we go,
but only that your hand is leading us
and your love supporting us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Assignment for Next Time: Go and do likewise!