

Sermon for Feb 9, 2025  
Year C – Epiphany 5 – Faith Lutheran Church  
Pastor Megan Floyd

Grace and peace to you from God, our Creator, and from Jesus Christ, our Savior... the holy seed in whom we place our hope. Amen.

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It is a fact of life that we don't get to choose *when* we live, but I think it is safe to say... we are living in challenging times.

The intentional chaos and resulting uncertainty of the past month is a lot of political theater, and not entirely unexpected...

but what has really thrown me for a loop are these new attacks on the faithful, steadfast work of mainstream Christians with a long history of serving the poor and vulnerable.

ELCA Lutherans and our many siblings in Christ, who faithfully LIVE and PREACH God's saving message of mercy for all people and love for all people, are being challenged as adversaries to the current cultural powers.

But... Love... and mercy... caring for the vulnerable and centering those on the margins are ...and have always been... central to Jesus' teaching and contrary to cultural norms.

And yet... here we are... these are challenging times.

You can imagine how I felt this week when I pulled up the lectionary texts for today and read poor Isaiah's faithful response to God's call – Here I am, Send me! ...and then... what he's actually being sent into.

God called Isaiah to preach to people who are deaf to God's word, and blind to God's ways... to go to a people who are so hard of heart that they turn away from those in need and turn away from God's mercy.

Isaiah was called into God's service... in challenging times.

Jesus also lived in challenging times... in Matthew chapter 13, he quotes this very passage from Isaiah to refer to the people he's preaching to... those for whom the good seed of God's word falls among thorns or shallow soil.

And of course... Jesus preached to his neighbors in his hometown, sharing stories of God's mercy for the foreigner and the alien... and his neighbors are so angry and offended... they are determined to throw him off a cliff.

So maybe the truth is... the times really haven't changed all that much.

But thankfully, I am not Isaiah... and God has called me to preach to you, who are certainly NOT hard of heart...

You are a people who have heard God's call to love, to offer mercy, and to stand with the vulnerable... and you have poured your hearts and your treasure into this... God's mission.

And yet still... these are challenging times.

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The good news is, that true growth really only happens when we face a challenge, so maybe living in challenging times isn't so bad.

Think about this.. Giant Sequoia trees are the largest trees on earth and can live 3,000 years.

There are Giant Sequoia trees that were already ancient when Jesus' message of love and mercy got him killed 2,000 years ago.

These incredible trees can only reproduce... the seeds can only germinate... if they go through fire.

The seed cones have a hard resin that only melts away when exposed to the extreme temperature of fire.

But the fire also clears the ground upon which the seed falls... and it clears a space in the forest canopy, to let in water and light.

The only way that new growth can happen for a Giant Sequoia tree... is to endure challenging times... the fire that burns away and seems to destroy... also leads to healthy, new creation.

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For Isaiah, his people were facing the fire of God's judgment

He was called to warn his people that turning away from God would lead to their ruin... even though he knew they would not hear him or heed his words.

Their actions would lead to exile... they would face... challenging times.

But for God, judgement is NEVER the last word... judgement is not how it ends.

For when all else is gone... a seed remains... a holy seed, the stump of Jesse... from which healthy, new, redeemed creation can and will grow.

God's promise has always been... that death does not get the final word, and all is not lost because God is faithful and true.

God promised that these challenging times would lead to a new creation, and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has fulfilled that promise to you!

God's word of judgment reminds us how much we need God... and the love of God through Jesus assures us that, even in the darkest moments, there is light.

And where there is light... there is hope.

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We need this constant reminder because we are a people who are easily swayed by the noise of society.

We need the centering words of Jesus, our Good Shepherd, to remind us who we are... and whose we are.

We need to come and be surrounded by our community of Faith, to remember that we belong to Christ, who claimed us with love and calls us to share that love with the whole world... not just our families and immediate communities, but the WHOLE world.

We need Christ, our cornerstone, to strengthen our resolve to live according to God's word, especially when that way is more and more counter to the way our culture seems to want to go.

This is a community that gathers around the proclamation of Christ, and him crucified, and so I believe we know what to do...

We lean on Jesus... In these challenging times, we lean on Jesus and immerse ourselves in his words and teachings...

We lean on Jesus, and allow our God to guide and comfort us... to be our light in the darkness.

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The path forward in challenging times is never easy... but the path is clear... if we keep our focus on Christ.

In George H. Martin's commentary, he wrote that in challenging times, "the reality known to people of faith is that we walk in the way of the Lord, while others seem to walk in a different direction.

We live among people who who want to hate their enemy, and yet we hang on to a message about loving not just your neighbor but your enemy as well.

We live in a world of wars and rumors of wars, and yet we have a Lord who suggests that when we are weak we are strong.

Such is the cross-based faith of our Christianity.”

In these challenging times, when the world tells us to turn away from the vulnerable, to be suspicious of those who are different, and to show no mercy for those we’ve pushed to the margins...

...these are the times when we grow.

These are the times when we, faithful followers of Christ, must recommit ourselves as disciples... fishers of people... followers of Jesus.

These are the times when we reaffirm our baptismal promises and renew our trust in God’s abundant mercy and grace and our assurance that this incredible mercy and grace is for ALL people, in all the world.

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So like the fire in the forest that opens the seeds of the Giant Sequoia, Lord we pray to you, let the fire of our time and the judgment of your word open our hearts to new growth, new creation, and a renewed passion for your word.

Open our hearts to new expressions of love and mercy for our neighbors, especially our neighbors in need.

And Lord, in this work, fill us with renewed JOY... the joy that comes from basking in your light and living in your way of peace.

Because we will have joy, and yes, we will have empathy and love, because we are called and claimed by God and given grace upon grace through our Lord, Jesus Christ...

And the success of God’s grace is not dependent on us, but on the steadfast faithfulness of God and God’s promise to redeem and renew the world... and usher in a new Creation.

Until that day, we who follow Christ have the JOY of living in God’s light, even when we feel we are surrounded by darkness...

For we know that God’s light and God’s love will always have the final word.

Amen.