

This is what the LORD says: "Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed. ⁶And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant-- ⁷these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." ⁸The Sovereign LORD declares-- he who gathers the exiles of Israel: "I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered."

BOUND TO HIM

Isaiah 56:1, 5-6

Things have been ramping up in Washington; and every day, it seems, there is a barrage of unsettling comments, commentary, reaction, conversation, rehashing, retracting, revising and everything in-between. Russian hacking, staff upheaval, immigration, mobs, fights, hate groups, special investigators, congressional hearings, tweets, posts, North Korean threats, media frenzy and media bashing.

I don't know about you, but frankly it gets my belly churning, my blood boiling, my mind distracted. The shouting voices, wrangling, positioning, repositioning, profiteering, -- the information and misinformation, opinions and polls. It's all so mind-boggling.

I need something to clear my mind. Don't you? I need a compass to help point me in the right direction -- to help me sort through all the mess and find some measure of sanity.

I think the prophet Isaiah, who, by the way, was no stranger to rumbling enemies and wrangling leaders, has a few words to help us today -- to help get our minds right amid the sea of sound bites and media clips clamoring for attention.

I would liken his words to my experience with my lawn this past week. For years and years I have been trying to learn how to cut on diagonals with straight lines. And I'll be honest, I've never had much success. While Brian Mosemann's church cutting looks like it was done by a surveyor using precision machinery, or by the Brewers ground crew, my lawn has always looked a little more like -- well, as if it was cut after having been on sedation and still finding my way out of the operating room.

But last week I tried something I had heard. I sat in one corner of my lot, and I picked out a tree directly diagonal to my spot. And as I drove, I continued to keep my eyes on that tree, and only that tree. And when I was done, then I just went back and forth following that original line.

You know what? It worked. Still doesn't look as good as Brian's, but its far better than any other time I've ever done it.

That's what Isaiah offers us today. A place to focus, so we don't get distracted by all the other nonsense that keeps ringing in our ears. A place to fix our eyes, so that we can keep the line straight.

Here are some points that I see from Isaiah's prophecy:

1. BOUND TO GOD. Sanity for the nations – strength and help for you and me in THIS nation – is first found when we are bound to God. As Isaiah declares: “foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him... these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer.”

Are you looking for joy, peace, strength, security in a world of so many lies, so much violence, injustice, pride and selfishness? I am too. And this passage reminds me that it is not going to be brought to me by any government leader, political party, celebrity, athlete, occupation, legislation -- anything or anyone that has been corrupted by sin. I can't count on them. They will let me down. They will disappoint. And they can, potentially, lead this world into moral bankruptcy or physical destruction. I can't count on them.

But I can count on Him. Him who loved me enough to walk into this world of violence and pain, Him who loved me enough to absorb it all on His own body, Him who loved me enough to bear its horrible consequences on a hard wooden cross, and Him who was powerful enough to emerge on the other side as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. I can count on Him every time. He has proven His reliability with His very own body and blood. He has validated His commitment to my care by humbling Himself and walking forth unto the jaws of my pain. And He has displayed forever His worthiness of my worship by conquering every one of my worst enemies: sin, death, and the devil.

So...as I turn on the TV, listen to the radio, read the newspaper, talk to my neighbors, interact with strangers... the first thing I am going to do is not argue about political ideology or stake my claim on any king, prince, president, congress, -- governor, mayor, or judge. Nor on those who might oppose those who, at the moment, seem to me to be in the wrong.

I am going to stake my claim on Jesus – and He will always be the heart, core and center of my dialog while I journey through, what Luther called, this vale of tears. Because I know that when I am with Him, I am

in the right place. And so I will pray – to Him. And I will immerse myself in doing what He calls me to do: To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with my God.

2. Which leads me right in to point #2. If point #1 is that need to be BOUND to Him. Point number two is the natural consequence of number one. And you know what that means. MOVING IN STEP WITH HIM. Picture yourself bound to another person. Hand to hand. Leg to leg. Body to body. When you are bound, then you move like that individual no matter how the rest of the world is moving. If I'm bound to Gordon Hahm, then when he gets in his truck and listens to polka music, I'm going to listen to it too. If I'm bound to Sally Canapa, then I might find myself riding horses and reading Shakespeare. If I'm bound to Greg Bell, I'm likely to be found on the golf course. To Mike Litman, at the Apple store. Hans Hargens, listening to a European organ or heavy metal band. And Brian Mosemann –of course, on the lawn mower making straighter lines than me.

But I'm not bound to any of those – nor am I to any world leader or political party. I am bound to Christ. And that means that I want to do what He would do. I want to move in step with Him.

Isaiah says, in verse 1: “Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed.” Verse 3: “serve God, love the name of the LORD, and worship him.”

So... as is clear from God's Word. I am called to love all people, even the foreigner, even the man of another faith, even the woman who embraces a different view of sexual orientation, even the alien who comes to my city, even the bigot whose ramblings are offensive, even the enemy who persecutes me. I am called to LOVE – because God is love. And in Jesus He showed me what love is all about. I am BOUND to Him.

But let me be clear. While I am called to love -- that doesn't mean I am called to embrace the attitudes of my enemy, nor accept the biases of the bigot, nor worship the gods of the pagan, nor agree with ramblings of a leader. I am not called to be BOUND to them. I am called to be bound to Christ. And that means that I call on HIM be my Leader and that I speak up where He would speak up, and I keep quiet when He would keep quiet, and that I love and serve even as He has loved and served me.

BOUND to Him – by Grace through Faith. MOVING IN STEP WITH HIM – to be His light and His love to the people that surround me and the world that He gave me.

So where will that take me? Certainly not just trapped behind a computer screen or in front of HDTV or closed up, like a recluse, in my home. That's not moving in step with Jesus. Look where He was in our text.

Out among people – a Canaanite woman in our Gospel Lesson – whom the disciples deemed not worthy of Jesus' time, but whom He Himself actually wanted to prompt toward a richer and stronger faith.

And that's where we are called. To be out there – amid all those whose lives and hearts are cluttered, confused, frustrated, angry – out there among the victims of a sinful world that is wracked with pain -- with the message of a Savior who serves, who loves, and who saves. With the message of a God who walked and walks among us with open hands and outstretched arms. And that's a message that's not likely to come from Washington or Hollywood or even from Green Bay. But it IS the message of God's people – the CHURCH -- who know that it is THE message that transcends all others and actually offers real and everlasting rescue.

Will we get hurt when we get out from behind our computer screens and try to make a difference? Will it go perfectly? Of course not. Look where it took our Lord Jesus Himself. Right into the middle of an angry mob. Right to the heart of an ugly cross.

But in His victory, we find victory too. And so, like the prophets before us, we go out to the Charlottesville's and Boston's – to the Newtowns and the Orlandos – to the Parises and Londons and Barcelonas -- to the Beghdads and Tehrans, and Jerusalem's and Damascuses – not with might nor with power, but with the Spirit of our God who, by BINDING HIMSELF to us, in Christ, enables us to love and to serve one another.

God grant it to you and me for Jesus sake. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.