

LIKE THE RAIN COMING DOWN

God's Word is just like the rain coming down. It does what it is sent to do.

God's people were living in Exile in Babylon. According to history, those in exile were able to enjoy the benefits of Babylonian life and free to maintain their own religious life and worship even though they were not allowed to worship at the temple or offer sacrifices, but they were able to learn about their past traditions.

Doesn't that feel a little like us? We are living in exile right now according to the fact that we can't worship in our temple, yet, we can still worship at a distance.

It was different in that they didn't have computers or ways to mail things. And yet, unlike us, those together in exile could still worship together.

When the prophet Isaiah proclaims that God wants them to return to Jerusalem---by then, most of the older generation would have died. Those who remained would have heard the stories of Jerusalem, but that generation would be very comfortable and settled, whose children were born in this new country they now lived in.

Do they even want to go back to a place where there are no immediate opportunities for making a living?

The task of the writer of Isaiah 40-55 is to convince the people to return to Jerusalem and build the temple and city again.

These words from what we call second Isaiah have some very positive words of hope for those living away from their homeland.

This experience of living in exile has made them realize that they have to rely on the grace of God alone and that it is only by God's loving kindness that they can know forgiveness and they can start over again.

They have been in exile so long that most of the people grew up there now and don't even know what their homeland looks like.

It's like me trying to imagine Norway. I've never been there and yet the family homestead where my great grandfather grew up is still in the family. It is called Evavollen. Of course that is where my name came from.

Now through the prophet Isaiah, God's word comes including these words: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways, my ways, says the Lord. Just as the skies are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

God's promise is that God is about to do something new and God's people will become a light to the world.

Our human thoughts have a hard time imagining that the world can become new. But God can and calls us to listen.

And that is the Good News from what is even called the Gospel of 2nd Isaiah.

With God all things are finally possible.

God's Word is like rain falling on seeds that are planted in the ground. We know how important rain is on crops or gardens. Crops and plants will not grow without water.

In the same way we are totally dependent on God's word for our lives. We were made to depend on it.

We need God's Word. We need the promises of God that good things can come out of whatever comes our way in our lives.

Sometimes it's a struggle like the one we are living in right now. We want to hurry things along--- to get rid of the virus or find a cure, so life can be normal again.

In the meantime, there are lessons to be learned, like more time together in the places we are, and maybe focusing on every day as a gift from God.

An example of something that was learned out of a near tragedy happened in the life of the late famous author, James Michener.

He was in the military and on a plane attempting to land on New Caledonia in the South Pacific when he faced his trauma. He was 40 years old and had never written anything except academic papers. When the plane he was in attempted to land in bad weather three different times, he and the crew saw the end.

They finally crash landed, and welcomed another chance at life, Michener went back to his quarters, sat down and wrote, "I'm going to live the rest of my life as if I were a great man."

The next day, he began writing South Pacific, which would win the Pulitzer Prize for literature in 1948.

Michener's brush with death had become his motivation to do what he had wanted to do since he was a small boy. At age 40, he described how he passed from youth to manhood in that near tragedy.

He went on to publish some 40 books during his life.

It makes me wonder what it is we can learn from the situation we are living in. What are some positive things we can learn from this?

In the midst of trials, God's Word still comes to us. Will life ever be the same when we get back to what we call a normal life?

I would think we will appreciate our lives more than ever.

The prophet Isaiah spoke some powerful words back in that day.

As he said, God's Thoughts and God's Words are not our thoughts or our words. We cannot see or understand what God's thoughts or plans are. But what we know about God shown to us in the life of Jesus is that God's thoughts and plans are great news for us.

They include God's love and acceptance for each of us.

Once again, like rain that accomplishes what it is sent to do, God's word does the same. Through God's Word, God gets what God wants.

It is that God becomes for us one who gives us life out of our struggles and even out of our deaths.

Next time, when the rain comes down after a dry period, think about the promise that that is what God's Word is like. It comes to quench our thirst for God. It comes to remind us that God is always right with us. And most of all it comes to give us life forever with God.

Amen