

Preface: May the words I speak be only truth, and may that truth bring us to a deeper understanding in our journey in God's love.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? So says the first reading. Twice. Seems like Isaiah is telling us to listen up.

It's one of the greatest attention-getters in almost any conversation. People use it all the time: "did you hear that so-and-so is getting married to that guy? Did you hear that so-and-so died?" In fact, I used that expression only last week. I do not know whether it is comforting or not to know that the preface for almost all modern gossip, good and bad, has been around for millenia. At any rate, it gets you listening.

So.

Have you not heard that the Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the heavens and the earth? He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless! Sounds pretty excellent.

And Isaiah tells us that it gets EVEN BETTER. Even the youths will faint and grow weary, the young will fall exhausted.

How many times have we said that we got through something only because God was at our side? I remember, when I was in the depths of a very severe depression, that I somehow survived a trip to Cincinnati with my family for a wedding. I don't remember much of the weekend (even through pictures), but I know that God got me through it.

Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall run and not grow weary. They shall walk and not grow faint.

The Psalm emphasizes this even more. Not only does the Lord rebuild Jerusalem (I understand that's a pretty excellent thing), but he also:

Gathers the exiles out of Israel.

heals the brokenhearted

lifts up the lowly

prepares rain for the earth, makes grass grow upon

mountains, green plants for mankind, and provides food for the flocks and herds. How lucky we are to experience this!

Healing of our heartbreak. I'm sure we can all relate to having some form of heartbreak in our lives, and the gratitude we feel to God for helping us through it.

But wait, there's more! Paul tells the Corinthians about proclaiming the Gospel, the GOOD NEWS. He tells us how

to do it: for the Jews he became a Jew, to those under the law he became one under the law, even though he is not. To the weak he became weak. In essence, he made sure that he spoke the language of his audience, and met them where they are. In so doing, he became accessible to everyone who heard his message. He became comprehensible. It helps us get on board with this. We all know how quickly a conversation can end when someone uses “jargon” that we don’t know.

In the Gospel, Jesus came into town, casting out demons, healing the sick. First he helped out Simon’s mother-in-law with her fever, and, as we have learned, news spread. I can imagine the people of the town saying things like, “haven’t you heard about the guy visiting Simon’s mother in law? He made her better!” By the end of the day, the whole city was

gathered around the door to ask Jesus to cast out demons and heal the sick. The next morning Jesus went out and prayed alone. Once Simon and his companions found him and told him that everyone was looking for him, Jesus spoke of his real mission:

Let us go out to neighboring towns, so that I may **proclaim the message there also**. Proclaim the message of the Lord rebuilding Jerusalem, giving strength to the weak, heals the brokenhearted, gives power to the faint, strengthens the powerless. And more! What a joyful and wonderful message. A message that has been with the prophets for, well, about as long as that gossip-preface has been.

Jesus proclaimed the message by helping to heal the sick, casting out demons. He didn't stand on a soapbox and *tell* it. He *proclaimed* it, through his actions. The old adage of

“actions speak louder than words” is true even for the son of God. Or maybe especially.

So how do **we** proclaim the message? Jesus did it by casting out demons, healing the sick. But what about us? What do our actions show? Deacon Barbara turns us toward the door, where our mission truly begins. YES! It’s great that we spend this time together as a community, and share our love and friendship with each other, but why stop there? Jesus went to neighboring towns. Paul spoke the language and entered the culture of those he proclaimed to. So why should we limit our proclamation to just these walls, just our Episcopal friends? And do we have to tell everyone that being Episcopalian is the best way to proclaim and learn of the good news? As much as I wish we could (I like being Episcopalian!), it would contradict Paul’s advice of meeting

people where they are so that they can truly understand and internalize the message.

So how will we live God's message and, in so doing, proclaim it? How will we spread the love of God through this world through our actions? I do not expect us all to be able to cast out demons, but we certainly can spread the love of God and the joy we have from it, even if we use terminology that's not necessarily "Jesus." The customer who ends every phone call to the pharmacy with "God bless you, dear," brings me joy and love of God. There's a lady who comes into my work every month to give me a copy of Living Faith, the "roman catholic" version of our Forward Day By Day booklet. She doesn't do it out of effort to convert me; she does it out of love for God and love for me. What a beautiful way to proclaim! Returning my cart to the cart corral might help the

cart-pusher feel a little more joy and a little less drudgery. (I am very big on this thanks to my own cart-pushing experience.) Listening. Holding hands with someone as she or he grieves, and allowing them the comfort that their grief is valid and accepted. Sharing in the joy of someone who just got good news. Doing it. Living it. We don't just go to church; we are the church. In being the church, even outside this beautiful building, we proclaim the message.

Amen.