

# Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



**Isaiah 55:6-13** "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; <sup>7</sup> let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. <sup>8</sup> For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. <sup>10</sup> "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup> so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. <sup>12</sup> "For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. <sup>13</sup> Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

## Singing with the Exiles: "We Are Going Home"

Home! Just one word, "home," yet it evokes feelings of love and laughter, security and serenity, warmth and welcome. Home! It means mom and dad, fun and games, good cooking, restful sleep. Home. Dorothy was right when she said, "There's no place like home." And Easter is God's promise to you that you are going home.

Let's unpack that promise this morning. Isaiah is writing these words to that same group we've been considering all Lent long during our midweek Lenten services. He's speaking to the sixth century Israelites who were stuck living as exiles in Babylon. They were a long ways from home. Their terrible reality called Babylon was a fire-breathing monster that devastated everything. In 587 BC, the empire decided once and for all to destroy Jerusalem, the jewel city of Israel, and their home; but it was described in the Babylonian archives as **"a rebellious city, hurtful to kings and provinces, and a place of rebellion from ancient times."** (Ezra 4:15) Home was now gone.

Now living in refugee camps, Judeans are stuck in the land of the ziggurats, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, surrounded by tall walls with their hundreds of fortified gates, and reminders everywhere they looked of that detestable Babylonian idol Marduk. The rolling hills of Judah, the mother-city of Jerusalem, the precious Jordan River, they've all been replaced by the concrete jungle of Babylon with all the constant building projects of Nebuchadnezzar. The Judeans have no king, no rights, no temple, no royal city, no lands, no sacrifices, no hope, and no future. Oh, how they must have yearned, "There's no place like home!"

And though they're far away from home, the more pressing issue is that they were far away from the Father. Just like the prodigal son, the Israelites demanded their fair share of the inheritance, set off for a distant country, and squandered it all on wild living. Their laundry list of sin was long as it was ugly: cultic worship of Baal, the lust-laden worship of the Ashtoreth, perverting justice and righteousness, going through the motions of worshipping the Lord with a false faith behind it. And the end result was that on or around August 19, 587 BC, Jerusalem, their home, was destroyed.

Some of us are far away from home, but, more pressing, all of us are far away from the Father. That's just the way we operate by nature. We are again, right here, just now, stuck in an exile of our own making. We demand our fair share of the inheritance and set off for the distant, seductive, deadly lights. We sell off our baptismal promises—and for what?! Double-faced lives, empty relationships, window dressing our appearance, all to inflate our own egos. And then, when we've sold it all, Satan pounces. He places his foot on our necks and shouts, "God is finished with you. You have gone to far. You're never going home."

And yet exiled in sin though we are, God speaks to exiles. In verse 12, God is speaking to a captive people far from home when He says, ***"You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."*** Just when all singing had stopped as Israel's history seemed to end, controlled by hopeless Babylonian dictates, to the shock and surprise of everyone, God stirred up a deliverer. To them, he sent Cyrus, King of Persia to defeat Babylon and release Israel. And to us, a child was born. When we were hopelessly lost in the grief of sin, God sent His Servant to be wounded for our transgressions and to be crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon *Him* and by *His* wounds, we are now healed. Isaiah has been reaching out to the exiles again and again in these chapters, and now we've reached the climax: God is bringing the exiles home.

Standing behind this promise of Isaiah is God's almighty Word. Earlier in the book, Isaiah had written, ***"The Word of our God stands forever."*** (Isaiah 40:8) Now, in these verses the Lord promises that this same Word will never return to Him empty, but it will accomplish His purpose. Additionally, He comes with the assurance, that You can always find Him in His Word. ***"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near."*** That's not a challenge to us to try to find God, His point is that He is nearby and ready to answer. He is here, ever present in His Word, where even exiles like us can turn and find Him speaking to us. Speaking Words of comfort, of forgiveness, of peace, of a future. Declaring to us, ***"You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing."*** If God says it, it's as good as done.

For in Bethlehem, that Word took on flesh and blood, the Word had a heart. Jesus, the Word made flesh, He knew firsthand the bitter pain of exile. He too was far away from home. After all, He said, ***"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head."*** (Luke 9:58) But more pressing than that, He was far away from the Father. Jesus was betrayed, spit upon, and scourged. Stretched out upon the cross, He cries out, ***"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*** (Matthew 27:46) And then bodily raised to life on the third day, He announced that He would be going home, and you would be too.

There was a popular show on ABC quite a few years back, perhaps you remember it. It was called "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition." The premise was that the producers would find a family that was enduring some sort of financial or medical hardship, and ABC would finance a complete renovation and remodel of their home to make it absolutely perfect for their family. It would be the perfect home. Well, turns out that even the perfect home doesn't last very long. Reportedly, a number of the families eventually lost their perfect homes due to foreclosure, as they were unable to keep up with the added financial burdens of increased property taxes and much higher utilities. Even the perfect home still isn't home.

And you've experienced that too. We may seek comfort in the accumulation of stuff, but it's never enough and always leaves us wanting more. We may just want the peace of family life, and yet our families too experience strife due to sin. We may just be seeking quality time with loved ones, yet we lose the ones we love the most. How can we go through life always searching for the perfect home and never finding it? We just want a home! "There's no place like home!"

Thanks be to God. When Christ arose victorious on Easter, it meant that He was going home and you would be going with Him. Because Jesus lives, we, too, shall live. Because Jesus rose, we, too, shall rise on the last day. He will take us Home. There will be the perfect home, the New Jerusalem. There will be no more pain, no tears, no cancer, no sickness, no depression, no death, no strife, and never an end. Jesus promises, ***"In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."*** (Jn. 14:2-3)

Yes, we are strangers here, we are exiles in a strange and distant land. We are captive to our sin and death, but God declares, ***"You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."***

And our response? It could be like that of the hymn we'll be singing in a few minutes! ***"Sing with all the people of God, And join in the hymn of all creation. . . For the Lamb who was slain Has begun His reign. Alleluia!"*** So today, let's join with the departed saints, some who have gone long ago, some who have passed only recently, and yet with them all today we can join in singing an endless and deathless Alleluia. Why? Because we are going home! Amen.

***"And the peace of God which surpasses all our understanding will guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.

Pastor Sam Rodebaugh  
April 4, 2021  
Easter