

Isaiah 29:11-19

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Today we turn to the Word of the Lord given through the prophet Isaiah, “Ah, you who hide deep from the LORD your counsel, whose deeds are in the dark, and who say, “Who sees us? Who knows us?” You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, “He did not make me”; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, “He has no understanding”?”

Is it not yet a very little while until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest? In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain

fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.”

I recently saw on Facebook someone share a quote by Alexis Carrel, “Man cannot remake himself without suffering, for he is both the marble and the sculptor.” Now, that certainly sounds like a very nice quote to share. It’s inspirational. It tells us that we can do this, all we have to do is stand strong long enough to get through it all. It has all of the marks of a great, viral quote that is just vague enough to apply to almost anyone in any situation.

The problem though, is that it completely forgets our place as human beings within creation. As Isaiah points out today in different words, we are not the sculptors. We are the marble. We are the clay. We are that which has been created by something, someone, far bigger and greater than we can imagine. Now, of course I recognize that us living with this realization completely

undercuts the entire self-help nature of this quote and the vast majority of the self-help industry and market. To that, I say, “Good.”

That’s not to say that we have no ability or reason to do anything to make changes in our lives. Go learn a new skill. Go on a diet. Begin a new hobby. Make changes. Those are all perfectly acceptable things for us to do. But we ought not to think that we are the source of the things that we are working with. We are not the sculptors. We are not the potter. We are the marble, we are the clay.

When we forget that, we begin to think more of ourselves than we ought to. We begin to see ourselves as being in the place of God. This is the most common kind of idolatry that exists in our culture today. We have all that we need, or we think that it’s easy to get what we need or want, so there is no longer any need to look at anything or anyone beyond ourselves.

We determine what media we watch, read, and consume. We live in our own little bubbles of isolation with the people in it that we want, with very little interaction with people who don't fit into our bubbles or that might not want to be in our bubbles.

We don't have to pray that the crops will come in this year so that we can survive the winter. We don't worry about what will happen once night falls. There is little danger of our community being raided and the people around us dying in battle. All we have to do is look at the news to see the sad reality of the culmination of Satan's lie to Eve that we will be like God. When we think ourselves to be like God, people die.

This is seen in the life of Alexis Carrel as well. He was a French surgeon and scientist in the early days of the 20th century. He was instrumental in helping to put into place many eugenics driven policies in France. Eugenics, if you are not aware, is the school of thought that certain people are inherently

more valuable than others, and so we owe it to the world to rid ourselves of the undesirable peoples. When man thinks that he is God, he begins to thin out creation. Let's get rid of the people who we don't like. We can get rid of the disabled, the different, and the odd. We can murder the unborn. We euthanize the elderly who no longer have any use to us. We can even take the lives of our own classmates because it doesn't matter if we are gods, right? Of course, this also led to Carrel being accused of collaboration with the ultimate eugenicists of the 20th century; the Nazis.

Sadly, this thinking of man that leads him to seeing himself in the place of God is nothing new. It has happened before. We read from our text, "And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men..." Yes, the only reason they had

any fear left for God was because it was the tradition. It was a cultural kind of faith, not something to be actually practiced and deeply believed.

You see, we ought not ever say to ourselves, “Well, I’m a Christian so I couldn’t possibly be an idolater.” The people of Israel and Judah saw themselves as people who belonged to Yahweh, but that didn’t stop them from ALSO worshipping other false gods. In the same way, just bearing the title of Christian does not by itself prevent us from also worshipping false gods around us, up to and including ourselves.

The people gave God lip service, saying all the right things, but they were more concerned with the things of the world. That’s the reality of the false gods in our world; they offer us power and results right now, today. But they do so at the cost of eternity. They offered the people of Israel and Judah the promise of fertile land, fertile spouses, good weather, and the like.

Today, our false gods offer us money, fame, success, and sex. Not too different really. And what's worse is that many of us delude ourselves into thinking that God doesn't know about the other idols we have as long as we come to church on Sunday morning or we do the right thing at certain times. When we do this, we are just like the people that God speaks against in our text today. He knows the truth. Let none of us think that we are beyond temptation either. As one of my professors at the Seminary said about a different sin, "If you think it can't happen to you, you're the one it'll happen to."

But you see, our God knows this. He knows the struggles and difficulties that we have because we are beset not only from outside of ourselves with the sins of the world, but we are beset by our own sinful natures as well from within our own hearts. And so, if we return to our text from Isaiah, God continues, "...therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this

people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.”

The rest of this text is a wonderful promise and prophecy of the restoration, the day of the new creation. It is an eschatological vision that Isaiah shares with the people. He points them forward to the day when God will make the fruitless places fruitful and the fruitful places incredibly fruitful. If we would keep reading from where our pericope ends today, we would read, “For the ruthless shall come to nothing and the scoffer cease, and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off, who by a word make a man out to be an offender, and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate, and with an empty plea turn aside him who is in the right.”

Isaiah points the people forward to the day when not only the world will be restored and made fruitful in a way that they

had never seen it, but also a day when evil will be finally removed and destroyed from their midst. And he notes that it is happening soon! It will yet be only a little while before these things come to pass. How exciting! That's a wonderful thing to look forward to.

But you see, God didn't wait until the Last Day to begin this restoration. He sent his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ into history, into human flesh to restore us and to redeem us. It is in the ministry of Christ that we see these words of God fulfilled, "In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel." This language that clearly is pointing to "that day," the Day of the Lord is fulfilled in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one

who brings the end into the middle. He brings the future into our past.

He came to bring the final judgement of God into human history. Yes, Judgment Day has already happened. The Great and Terrible Day of the Lord has already passed. It occurred on the day when the innocent and righteous blood of Jesus was shed at the cross for you and for me. The judgment of God was poured out onto him who came to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The cup of God's righteous wrath was drained by Christ in your place and mine. Jesus took our punishment. He suffered the wrath that should be reserved for you and for me.

The one who is the true potter, the one who is the true sculptor died for us, his creation. He paid the price of his very own life so that we would have life. This was a reality that Alexis Carrel came to realize. Before his death, he confessed his

belief in the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the truth of all that the Church teaches. This man who had lived his life as though he were the sculptor came to realize that he was nothing more than the sculpture. He saw his place within creation and found comfort there. Just as there is comfort and grace for us who repent from our idolatry and who come running to the cross to see the truth of our lives and who we are created to be. Truly, the recreation of man does require suffering, but it is not our suffering that is required. Rather, it was the suffering of the sculptor himself, our Lord Jesus Christ who suffered that we would be made new.

Indeed, the cup of God's wrath was emptied by Christ for Alexis, for you, and for me. In its place, Jesus instead gives us the cup of his own blood. He gives his own body for food. The potter gives of himself out of his love for his creation. He recreates us and makes us new in a way that will only be fully

revealed on the Last Day that Isaiah points us to in our text today. That is a great thing for us to have. We have dignity as the creation of God, all of us. And when we see that we are no different from other people who were also created by God, we are free to truly love our neighbors as ourselves. Thanks be to God for that. Amen.

Now, may the peace that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord to life everlasting.

Amen.