

Overcoming tragedy
Isaiah 62:1-5

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

This week we have seen tragedy. The pictures and stories coming out of Haiti are horrible and disturbing to see. We have seen tragedy before, we have read the newspapers and seen the television reports, we hear the first hand accounts of families and friends when it strikes, how they are doing, how are they coping. We empathize with them remember other instances of tragedies that may have occurred in your own lives, first hand. Most, if not all of us, knows what it means to face tragedy.

Tragedy comes in many forms. Nature heaps tragedy upon us, even as we think we control nature and are in charge of everything, nature shakes that idea right out of us. I feel saddened and shocked by the damage that earthquake has done to an entire country. But we also have felt that way because of Hurricanes, floods, tornados, droughts, wild fires, mudslides. It hurts deeply when you lose your house and your clothes and all your stuff. Think of all the family keepsakes, heirlooms, things given to you by your parents, grandparents, pictures and things that make you - you all washed away – gone. That is painful. There is only one word that can describe that experience- tragedy.

Tragedy also happens through accidents. Just this week we all probably heard of Justin, the 21 year old from Hanover who was killed when 18 year old Zachary another Hanoverian crashed his car into him killing him. In that one moment the life of one young man ended, the entire life of another young man was changed for ever, a state police trooper's life was changed, their families and friends were changed. The pain, the guilt, the anguish, the loss, the anger, the helplessness can only be described in one way – a Tragedy.

Tragedies also occur in human relationships. A broken relationship hurts both parties. This past week Shellene and I learned of a couple that I had married and we care greatly about are separating. While we enter into marriage hoping for a mutual love and honor that will last a life time, our human sinfulness sometimes overwhelms those vows of love and honor. Dividing families, tearing children apart – where do they go, who do they live with. Others getting involved, like parents or siblings, or friends trying to fix the situation sometimes even rip the families apart even more, there is fear, there is pain, sorrow, anger, resentment, frustration, helplessness. And only one word can describe it – A tragedy.

Tragedy is no stranger to human life. It is no stranger to any of us worshiping here today. The question is not will there be a tragedy in our lives. The answer to that question is a

resounding YES. The question is, how can we overcome tragedy when it confronts us? We all know people who are overwhelmed and destroyed by tragedy. They become perpetually bitter or angry. They lose the ability to roll with the ups and downs, and are stuck in that one place ever after, spiritually, physically, or mentally. We also know those who have overcome tragedy and are still an enjoyment to be around. They keep upbeat and positive, we marvel at their vitality. What is the difference between those who are destroyed by tragedy and those who overcome it?

Today we read the first five verses of the 62nd chapter of Isaiah. This prophet is writing to a people who know tragedy well. Their grandparents and parents were beaten in battle by the mighty Babylonian army and carried off to live in captivity for almost 50 years now. Then the Persian King Cyrus conquers the land and God's people are set free. What they had dreamed for had finally happened they were free again to return to their homes and their cities and their temple. But their dreams were short lived, because when they got back to the promised land, they saw the destruction that had taken place, their homes were rubble, their cities laid waste to, their temple destroyed. Their hopes and dreams were crushed –there were facing a true tragedy.

In to this tragedy comes the words of Isaiah, cutting in like a surgeon to mend this wound of this tragedy. It is a message for the people then six hundred years before Christ just as it is a message for us today. Look again at those five verses.

The first three verses of our text, Isaiah makes a promise to his people. It is an incredible promise that is so wild it can not be believed. God will take this beaten nation and make it the envy of the world. God will bring the nations to Jerusalem, to Mt. Sinai, where they will see God's splendor through God's people. Israel's future will be different than their immediate present or past. Isaiah is offering God's people a hope as the first step in overcoming the tragedy. Hope is essential for overcoming a tragedy. Hope means that tomorrow will be better than today's pain. Hope means the events causing the pain today, we cease and be gone tomorrow. Hope means there is a light at the end of the tunnel and no it is not an oncoming train, but a better day yet to come.

When tragedy strikes, our first reaction is to center on the present and the past. We use present and past tense verbs, I should have done this, why is this happening. We constantly remind ourselves of the pain and hurt which surrounds us, it is very hard to do otherwise when we are in the midst of a tragedy. All you can see is the blackness pulling you down into despair. But when we bring hope into the midst of the tragedy we can see the future, we can begin to see a way out, seek something better. Believing and understanding there can be a future that is better than today is the essential first step in overcoming a tragedy.

Now Isaiah also gives another ingredient for overcoming tragedy. In verse 4, he tells us that God will change the name of his people. No longer shall you be “termed Forsaken”. No more shall you be named “Desolate”. But now you shall be called “My Delight.” Changing a name might seem like a small insignificant thing, but in reality it can give an entire new understanding of the situation. When we change our names we change how we see ourselves. When others change the name they call us, it means they see us differently.

Children will change their names as they get older. My brother – Richard Griffin Jr. went from Ricky (a childish name) to Rick (a more mature name and the name we still use in the family) to also Rich (what others in the business world call him). Different names but the same man, but each name identifies him as something different.

Sometimes we change our names or others change them for us. Did you ever call yourself stupid, dumb, ignorant. Did you ever hear someone else say that about you to your face, in a whisper or even in a job review? It hurts. But when you hear things like resourceful, a go getter, a real leader then your entire attitude changes you feel better and stronger. Change the name, change the title, and we change the person. Just look again at the headlines, what kind of feeling do you feel when you hear “Haitian Tragedy”, “Devastation in Haiti”. versus “Survivors Rescued” or “Miracle World Wide Relief is Coming” Isaiah knows the value of self perception so he offers that promise in you are not forsaken, you are not desolate, you are “God’s Delight”.

Isaiah then gives yet a third part of over coming a tragedy. In Verse five he gives the possibility of a good and new relationship. God and Israel will be like that of a bridegroom rejoicing over a bride. They will be in such a relationship and feel that relationship just as a newly married couple is they shall be, with passion, love, adoration, where nothing is impossible and the skies is the limit.

Good and meaningful relationships are sometimes essential to overcoming tragedy. To often tragedy is built around the loss or fear of loss of relationship. If I fail they will stop loving me. If I tell the truth, they will turn away from me. Loss of significant relationship brings despair and often depression. Until we can begin to see and understand we will not be alone, there is no hope of overcoming the tragedy. When we know that we are not alone, that there are others there to support, help, and love us, in that we know we can begin to move ahead.

Tragedy is a part of life. It is a part of our lives and people that we know, and definitely seen in the world today just as it was in Isaiah’s time. Today, Isaiah shows us that in tragedy we can overcome it by looking ahead, having a hope in a better tomorrow. We can overcome tragedy when we can see ourselves in a new way, defining us not as destroyed but as a person or people of potential. We can overcome tragedy when we can see the possibilities of new relationships,

new connections. In all of this Isaiah tells us God gives us the tools to deal with and overcome the tragedies that do befall us and that will befall us. God is with us and God will rejoice over you. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. AMEN.

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

A brief Silence

We give thanks for the gift of your church, where we are fed and hear your word. Strengthen us with your Spirit so that we might be gifts to others. Lord in your mercy.

HEAR OUR PRAYER

Loving God, in the communion of Christ, we are joined with the trials and the sufferings of all. be with those who endure the effects of the earthquake in Haiti, those dealing with tragedies in their lives now. Protect them in the path of danger and give them a hope for tomorrow, show them that they are not forsaken, that they are not alone, in you grant them your presence and your safety. Lord in your mercy,

HEAR OUR PRAYER

Healing Lord, We give thanks for your saving word. Write it on the bodies, hearts and minds of all who suffer physically, mentally, or spiritually giving them your peace, lifting them up in love and granting them your hope, especially we pray for Howell Crawford, Crissie Redding Myers, Kim and Jim Bevins, Dan and Pam Keeney and all those we mention now.....

Send your Spirit of comfort to give them relief from their pain. Lord in your mercy,
HEAR OUR PRAYER

O God, we give thanks for the revelation of your creative power in this world. Reveal your love and hope in the midst of the suffering and chaos in Haiti, Iraq, Afghanistan, and all places that are torn apart by tragedies, natural or man-made. Give strength and perseverance to those who offer aid and comfort. Move us with your compassion to shoulder the burden of crisis and stand beside our fellow neighbors near and far that struggle in tragedy. Use us as your witnesses of hope and a love. Lord in your mercy,
HEAR OUR PRAYER

Prayers conclude with the Pastor Reading:

Into your hands, o Lord we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
AMEN.