

## Where is the One who was Laid in the Manger?

Isaiah 63:7-14

The First Sunday after Christmas, December 26, 2010

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

I will recount to you the faithfulness of Jesus. I will cause you to remember His praises. It will be according to everything that Jesus has done for us. It will be according to the multitude of His goodness. His goodness has been for us. He has done this goodness to us according to His compassions. It was according to the greatness of His faithfulnesses.

Jesus says, "You are My people. You are sons. A son will not deal falsely." And since that was the attitude that Jesus took toward us, He became our Savior.

In all of your distress, He was not distressing you. He saved you by His presence.

Jesus does not add to your stress.

In his book *Summer 1946* Garrison Kiellor tells the story of a 14 year old named Gary. It is hard not to believe that this is a fictional account of Kiellor's own childhood. Perhaps it is just his view of childhood. Throughout the book Gary thinks about Jesus from time to time. He knows that Jesus is up there in heaven looking down on him. He knows that Jesus sees everything that he does and hears everything that he says. He knows that Jesus is up there judging him for what he says and for what he does. Gary sometimes interprets events in his life as punishment from Jesus for other things that he had said or done. If Jesus is up there judging him, then Jesus must also be doling out the punishment. You get what you deserve.

I wonder if we don't believe the same thing about Jesus. We know that the Bible tells us otherwise, but we don't read the Bible or we don't heed it very well. Something bad happens to us and we immediately wonder what we did to deserve it. Something bad happens to someone we love and we feel guilty about it because we are sure that Jesus is punishing us for something that we did. The punishment this time was that someone we love got hurt. Only the more cold hearted among us would ask what the person who got hurt did in order to deserve what they got. Or some of us are judgmental enough to say of some people, "Well, he had it coming." Even when such statements are true because some people do have it coming, would we want what we have coming? Jesus is the divine Santa Claus checking to see if we have been naughty or nice.

Then there is what Isaiah proclaims about Jesus. In all of your distress He did not make your life more stressful than it already was. Jesus is not in fact up there in heaven monitoring everything that you do. Oh He sees it, but He does not damn you for it.

If Jesus functions according to a great compassion, if He does great goodness to us, if He is indeed faithful to us, then He will not condemn us. He is not up there in heaven trying to figure out how to make our lives more miserable than they already are. He is not up there in heaven trying to figure out how to make your life more stressful than it already is. We bring enough stress into our own lives without Jesus piling on some more for good spiritual measure.

In His love and in His compassion, He redeemed you. He has born and carried you, your whole life.

But we rebel. We grieve the Spirit of His holiness. So He turned us over to our enemy. He Himself fought against us. But it was not stress that He sent. He was not more pain and suffering than we bring on ourselves that He sent. He sent death. The wages of rebellion is death. Grieving the Spirit of

Holiness means death. Just ask anyone in the Old Testament. They'll tell you. Jesus does not need to arrange armies against us. Jesus does not need to make our lives miserable with diseases. Jesus does not need to bring into our families stresses beyond our ability to fix. We can do that just fine on our own. All Jesus does is introduce death. He introduced it to the firstborn of Egypt. He introduces it to us.

Yet in spite of our mortality, Jesus remembers us. He remembers that He is our Savior. He remembers His people. If He remembers us, why are we still mortal? If He remembers us why do we still die? It is good that He does not bring extra stress into our lives, but why doesn't He do something about the stress that we have? If He is indeed the Savior of the world, why doesn't He take away the misery that we have? We acknowledge that we deserve it, but that is what the Savior of the world does, does He not? Does He not save us from our sins? Where is Jesus?

Where is the One who was laid in the manger? Where is He who was born, King of the Jews? Where is the One who shepherded His flock? Where is the One who was crucified? Where is the One who rose from the dead? Where is the One who poured out into our midst the Spirit of His holiness? Where is the One who did all of these things in order to make for Himself an eternal name? Where is the One who descended into hell? Where is the One who is not overthrown? He did not once stumble.

He is sitting at the right hand of the Father. But there we are again with Jesus looking down on us from heaven again. There we are with Jesus monitoring our every move.

You know there is a country music song that has a line in it: There are holes in the floor of heaven and Grandma is looking down. Now I hate to say it, but there are not holes in the floor of heaven. Grandma does not look down. But we sure would like Grandma to look down wouldn't we? After Grandma is dead and gone we would still like her to see our basketball games. We would still like her to see us graduate from high school. We would still like her to see us be successful.

But there is a flip side to this. Do you want Grandma to look down from heaven and see you lie? Do you want her to see you committing fornication? I remember one of my seminary professors talking about his dead mother-in-law and was for sure glad that she could not see what happened in the bedroom.

But we still like that idea of Grandma looking down. We want someone to look down and see our successes. We want someone to look down on us with favor. Folks, that is who Jesus is. That is what the whole cross and resurrection thing was all about. It was so Jesus could look down on us from heaven and not condemn us in spite of our sins. If the cross and resurrection of Jesus forgive us of our sins, then Jesus is doing something different when He looks down on us than cooking up the next way to punish us for what we do wrong. If He has indeed forgiven you, then by definition He is not looking down on you to figure out what your next punishment should be for your sins. If He is planning to punish you for your sins, then He has not in fact forgiven you.

Since He has forgiven you, that leaves you with a Jesus who is doing something very different up there in heaven. He is still looking down on you, but it is for a very different reason. He is there to guide you.

He goes down into the valleys with you. In the midst of the misery, in the midst of the stress, He is there. He goes down to be with you like a beast of burden. When the family is stressed and you are stressed, He is there. He works to relieve the stress. When you are miserable or someone you love is miserable, He is there. He is working to relieve the misery. When you die or someone you love dies, there He is promising resurrection. Resurrection is the ultimate relief of stress and misery that the blood of Jesus can buy.

If Jesus is willing to go to the cross for you, He is not going to be put off by your every day problems. If Jesus is willing to suffer death and hell for you, then He is not going to shun the run-of-the-mill misery that life and we ourselves bring on ourselves. If Jesus is going to raise the dead, then Jesus will relieve you of the pain and suffering that you bear. He will relieve you of the pain and suffering that you bear. It will come. Watch for it.

Jesus is willing to have His Spirit dwell with you. He is willing to have His Spirit dwell within you. He sends His Spirit to His people. He sends His Spirit to you. He causes His Spirit to rest upon you. He rests upon you and He gives you rest. The Spirit works to relieve you of your suffering. The Spirit works to relieve you of your pain. The Spirit works to bring peace and wholeness to every part of your life. The Spirit guides you through each and every day.

This is how Jesus guides you. It is with His Spirit. Each and every day the Spirit is with you. Each and every day the Spirit is inside of you. Though you grieve Him, He remains. He is with you all of the time. He came at Pentecost. He stayed for your Baptism. When you get up and check your text messages, He is there. When you go to sleep and watch television, He is there. When you go to work, He is there. When you clean the house, He is there. The Spirit is with you always. He is always there guiding you in the right direction. He is always there leading you on to resurrection and eternity.

Jesus has a goal with all of this leading. It is to make a name of beauty for Himself.

It may insult the pride that Jesus does not save us for our own sake. But if Jesus saved us for our sake, then we would have to wonder about His loyalty. It would be dependent upon whether or not we deserved to have Him save us. So I will take a little humility and go with the fact that Jesus saved us for His Name's sake. When Jesus saves us for His name's sake, there is some certainty about the thing. The Name of Jesus is always good. Jesus will not permit His name to be tarnished. Therefore if He saves us for His name's sake, then we are for sure saved. If His goal in our salvation is to make a name of beauty for Himself, then He is not going to mess up His beauty.

And so Jesus does it all. He watches over us, sends us His Spirit. He guides and directs us. It is all done. It is all to make His Name holy.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.