

Read Isaiah 41:8-14a

As I read this passage this week, it made me think back to the time when I was preparing for my role as a minister of the word and sacrament. I remember feeling called by God to serve as a pastor, but wondering how I, a twenty something, could be worthy of such a call. How would I be able to share God's message in a way that people would listen to. How could I lead a congregation of His followers. I was afraid. I felt unworthy. And there were times when I was so afraid that I wanted to turn my back on this call that was before me. But God did not let me off the hook. God used the people around me. And the experiences of my everyday life to show me how he would shine his light through my life. God kept nudging me. God helped me to see that I didn't have to be worthy of the call that was before me. His light, shining through my life would be the only way for me to be worthy to be his servant.

I was held up any number of times during my time of preparation for ministry by this passage from Isaiah. You are my Servant. Whom I have chosen, and have not rejected. So do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. And I have to say, this passage has been a firm reality when it comes to my years in his service. If God had not strengthened me and upheld me in my years of service to him. I would not be here serving in this place and in this community today. It is God's ministry, not mine. And It is God's ministry not ours.

It occurred to me that this passage, that encouraged me to answer my call to serve and encouraged me through the years that God used to prepare me for this journey, could be used to encourage us to persevere through the time we spend at home protecting ourselves and our community from the spread of this virus. I thought that I would stand here, in front of this cross. In front of this empty cross. In front of this cross which is the ultimate symbol of these words of Isaiah's prophesy. This cross, and all crosses, remind us of the words of the prophet that were helpful for me, and I hope they can be helpful to you as you stay at home and wonder how this all will end. God's words to you are, "Do not fear" "I will help you." "Do not be dismayed, for I am your God." "I will strengthen you and help you".

The cross is the symbol that Jesus died to redeem us to the glory of our great God. This cross behind me makes real for you and me these words of encouragement that characterize God as our helper and our strength. Through all generations, our country and our world have persevered through many pandemics, and many natural disasters and human made disasters. We have persevered through economic disasters as well, and through all of that, the word of God still stands, "Do not fear, I am your God". And the love of the sacrifice that this cross proclaims still stands. God's words to you and me are, You are my servant! I chose you. So do not fear! I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I Am your God.

He is our God, no matter what task, no matter what obstacle might be before us. Even in the face of Covid 19. God says, "I will strengthen you and help you with my righteous right hand. When I was pondering my Call to serve, I was afraid. But God has used me. During this time of Covid -19, you might be afraid, just like I was, but if God could equip me, and if you had known me then, you would be truly amazed. If God could equip me, and mold me, and change me enough to be his servant. Then I know that by the grace of Jesus Christ whose cross stands here right by us, God is powerful enough to get us through all of this together.

Let us pray

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