

“From Desert to Crocus”

(Isaiah 35:1-7)

2nd Wednesday of Advent, December 11th, 2013

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Coming King, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Isaiah 35 is a special kind of Word of the Lord that is called “eschatological”. That is it’s about the last or end-time things, but we have to remember that we are also living in the end-times (1st Peter 4:7 says that the end of all things is at hand), so it is also about our time too. Thus to summarize: Isaiah 35 is talking about what is now and what is yet to come both at the same time.

In both of these views of what is now and what is yet to come, these words are absolutely and positively true: as Jesus comes to you right now through His Word and as Jesus will come again in glory it will be like the wilderness and the dry land becoming glad and the desert rejoicing as it blossoms like the crocus. The crocus is a desert flower which grows almost instantaneously after any substantial rainfall in the desert. So that in the final analysis we can see with our own eyes a stunning contrast that I tried to find in a picture. Take a look:



In this picture, you see a desolate background. It almost causes us to think, “what could possibly grow out of *that?!* ” It practically looks like the flower is growing out of the rocks. You might just as well expect water to come out of the rocks. Exactly! And yet this is not a theoretical idea. It is an actual state of affairs. It really happens.

But picture this: if you were to *remove* the flower from the picture, what you would see is a desolate scene of dry rocks. You would think to yourself, “there is nothing there,” unless you’re really into rocks, but even if you were, you would have to admit that we are not looking at the most fertile ground on the planet. Prospects for growth and renewal would appear rather dismal. But this is a fact Christian: it really happens! The crocus is a symbol of God’s

miraculous work! This sort of thing by the way happens on much grander scales. When Mt. Saint Helens erupted in Washington in 1980 scientists predicted that the land surrounding the mountain would remain desolate for many, many years. The life that sprang from the volcanic destruction, however, was both very fast and amazingly stunning. The analogy is important to us.

Getting back to the Isaiah 35 “now and not yet” double context, God assures us that on *the* last day, the earth itself will be renewed. Romans 8:21 says, “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Revelation 21:1 simply refers to this as “the new heaven and the new earth.” The day is coming when our bodies which atrophy through entropy will be renewed and we shall experience the exciting fruition of what John wrote, ***“...it does not appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him (1st John 3:2).”*** Kiss all your disease away. You will be raised in glory and power dear Christian (1st Cor. 15:43) just like your Savior-King rose leaving behind the desolate desert of death and covered it through His victory with the most lush and beautiful garden of life imaginable (Revelation is rich in describing this new garden...we should all like gardens...they are reminders of heaven; they are reminders of what God causes to sprout even from rocks).

But what about the “now” part? This is the hard part, but through faith in Christ the crocus sprouts in the desert even now. We just need to understand what to expect along the way: God is real with us. His Word describes what we can and do experience. For example, consider the words of the psalmist: ***“For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up...(Psalm 32:4).”*** To feel dry is to feel hopeless and to feel hopeless in the face of so many hardships is to feel fear and fear is antithetical to faith. This is what Christians can feel. This seems wrong. By definition Christians are people of faith. That’s true, but it is also true that we are sinners and sinners feel the other side, the dry side; the desert within our souls.

I heard from a baptized believer overcome with frustration about the desert in their life, words of unbelief spewing from lips that once confessed Jesus. It was predictable what would come next: God was to blame. It was all God’s fault including their horrendous decisions in rebellion against God. This is the insanity of sin, but that’s what happens in the desert sometimes: we start seeing things that aren’t really there.

Every moment of our lives is the experience of the undulation between faith and fear; hope and dryness; the crocus and the desert with its dry rocks. No, you’re not going crazy, but you are living the normal Christian life. That’s important to know lest the evil one tempt you to

think that you're going mad. No, you're a true Christian. You feel the battle, but when we do feel the battle, you must know something about that battle so that you can take it to the Lord. That same psalmist who confessed the dryness of his soul went on to write by God's inspiration, ***"I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin (Psalm 32:5)."***

And when you come confessing in God's house, you find that you've been led to the fresh, cool pool known as the church of Christ even in the midst of the burning sand which is the world, and the Lord gives to you His living water and absolves you of all your sins.

But don't forget that during the "now" the battle rages and without this wisdom you cannot properly prepare for Christmas nor wait in patience for the "not yet" renewal of all things. Luther saw in Isaiah 35 God's provision for the believer with the "weak hands and feeble knees (v 3)". In the next verse God sends forth His powerful word through Isaiah who commanded: "Be strong; fear not!" It is God who sustains us through the desert – and through all our battles -- even now the crocus of faith grows once again within you. Luther wrote,

"Therefore the inward joy of the spirit fights with the grief of the body exposed to the cross (LW 16:300)."

And the inward joy is protected when we become wise to the ways of the enemy. Luther wrote again:

"For Satan has two ways of fighting. He would gladly cast the faithful down suddenly from their joy and faith and into fear and despair. Secondly, he cunningly strives by long lasting torments and by the unremitting pressure of the torments to tire them out." (LW 16: 301)

But God's counter is the long-lasting gift of His water in the desert; His Word in your life. God's counter to the evil one's attacks upon you is to cause perpetually the growth of the crocus in the desert of this life. God's counter is to keep His Word raining upon you; keeping you in your baptismal pool of grace and life, feeding you with Christ's body and blood, and replacing hopelessness with the sure and certain hope that is yours in Christ.

It would be difficult to find a better example of the power of this crocus faith than the time when our Savior referred to these words from Isaiah as being fulfilled in His "now" ministry. John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus, *"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another (Matthew 11:3)?"* Jesus answered, ***"Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf***

hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them (Matthew 11:4-5)."

It must have been an amazing sight when John the Baptist received this message (and I'm not exaggerating, because I've witnessed a Christian die while expressing joy in the Lord while they died). There he was in prison, about to be beheaded, experiencing his cross, knowing his battle in the desert – but in receiving the Word of Christ – John must have been joyful with the crocus in full bloom in his heart. No desert, no prison robbed John of his joy.

And this is *your* joy dear Christian! Your coming King comes once again -- now -- and through His Word He opens your eyes once blind, your ears once deaf; He restores your legs once lame and your tongue once dumb. A saving crocus grows in you that is Christ in the desert, the rock from which the water comes, the source of faith and now you see that He is here even in the desert (no you are not abandoned); you hear His Word and it causes you to rejoice (yes, you are truly forgiven); you leap with legs of faith (for nothing can contain the joy of a sinner who is no longer condemned); and your mouth is opened: you once silenced and parched by the desert, confess that Jesus has covered your sin with His blood and has conquered your death with His victorious life! May you continue to blossom in Him as He comes now and as He is coming again!

