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“Rock From Which You Were Hewn” The Rev. Aaron M. G. Zimmerman
(8/27/2023, Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost)

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Let us pray.

Almighty God me the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts. Be always acceptable in thy sight. Oh Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

A few weeks ago, you know that there were some wildfires in Maui particularly the city of Lahaina. And one of the survivors of that fire recounted his experience. He realized the fire was moving very swiftly, he left his house he headed to the water because there was really nowhere else to go. And he ended up standing at the harbor in Lahaina sheltering behind a little brick building there. So the town was behind him, the hills behind him all in flames. And with this little hut to his back, protecting him from the flames that were racing down behind him, and in front of him was the harbor. And there was a little hurricane going on. And so the water was not placid and still it was being churned up. Think huge waves, whitecaps the wind raging, and from above was raining down embers. It looked like fire coming from heaven. And so he's got the fire behind him. The Embers above him, the water raging in front of him. And where does he go? Not to mention his neighbor next to him who didn't swim very well, and the dog they had picked up along the way.

Don't know if you've ever felt completely stuck in life. Now, that's a dramatic example.

Maybe it's not at that level for you. But many people even if it looks sort of normal on the outside feel really stuck inside with themselves with their family with their job with their life. And this is a theme that's really common. Out there in literature and in movies. If you read John Updike's 1960, novel rabbit run, it's a classic story of someone who reaches that midlife point and he's got a job that he doesn't like in a family that is a source of stress and difficulty for him. And one day he just leaves.

That's sort of a cliché. But as we know, it's, it happens all the time. It knows no gender, people just check out sometimes they stay physically, but mentally and emotionally, they are no longer really present and involved. That feeling of being stuck in a life. That's difficult. We saw this

in Barbie.

I don't know how many times you cried in that movie.

But for me, it was more than once.

There's a scene where the actor America Ferreira who plays the mother of a teen daughter and she has this really impressive monologue. Thank you Greta Gerwig, where she talks about the difficulty of being a woman and how there's really no way to do it. It's an impossible task. It's, you know, you have to be very elegant and feminine, yet down to earth and low maintenance. You have to be strong and powerful as a woman. But you have to also not step on anybody's toes or damage anyone's ego. It's this, it's this impossible thing. And I would say there are lists like that, that are impossible for everybody. As any clergy person up here could tell you, when you read the job descriptions, for clergy, in churches, it's like you must be someone who is John Mulaney, funny, and also has the prayer life of St. Francis.

You must attract young families, yet also not change anything about the church ever.

If you move so much as a single Fern, we will cut you, you know,

all these things are impossible to do and many human beings feel stuck because of that.

It could be an existential stuckness. It could be a financial stuckness there's some ridiculous number, like 60% of Americans live at a place financially, where if there were a \$400 unexpected expense, a transmission and medical thing, whatever. They wouldn't know how to pay that. They'd have to go into debt to do that or talk to a family member to help out. So this being stuck is this thing.

As David Byrne and Talking Heads says, How did I get here? That's from the video that's not a random new TikTok dance that's from the song.

The loneliness epidemic all these things people feel stuck. The prophet Isaiah in our passage from Isaiah 51 called at the waist places and he knew what he was talking about because he's talking to people who are stuck now in their very literal, concrete historical reality. They were stuck in exile. They had been invaded and forced to move

far from home out of Israel into Babylon, and it was kind of their fault. God had warned them for years, you know, do the right thing, or you're gonna go in exile, you know, don't worship idols. They're like, Oh, look at that lovely island over here.

God said, don't take advantage of poor folks. And they said,

We won't do it in like, in really obvious ways. We'll just put it in the fine print of the credit card license agreement.

God said, Don't eat the pizza, Chucky Cheese, you'll pay for it. It's not worth it.

I don't care how hungry you are. But they did. So no, that one that didn't happen. But over and over, God said Zig, and they zagged. And so they ended up in exile in Babylon, and they've lost everything and they're stuck. They have to learn a language, they have to totally change their culture, their way of life. They're stuck, they can't get home. They're completely disoriented. And just feeling out of sorts. I don't know if you've gone through that. There are probably many college freshmen two miles that way, that feel a little disoriented. I think of the students that have international students who've come from a culture that you know, there's no sports in college.

Greek system, what, why there's so many Greeks here, you know, all these weird things that make you feel odd. When you get away from home for the first time. Nothing is familiar, you feel disoriented, you feel a little lost, you feel stuck. And this is where the people of Israel are, they're lost. They're out of sorts, they're out of a comfortable place. They and they just want to go home.

They want to get back they want to get out of the waste places they want to get unstuck.

Well, the prophet Isaiah has two helpful things for people that feel stuck in a situation.

The first thing that Isaiah says is he tells the people to remember Coldplay, which Chris Martin in 2002, the first real big hit single the company had, it's called the scientist. And in that song, Chris Martin says, go back to the start,

which is what Isaiah says to do. In verse one, he says, Look at to the rock from which you were hewn, and the quarry from which you were dug.

Go back to the start. Go back to where you came from. Now, this is a reminder for when you're stuck. You didn't just get stuck on your own. There's a whole system around you there's a whole backstory, there's a whole family and environment and your autobiographical realities, your

testimony as they call it in churches, there's all these things about you, that made you who you are. Go back to the to the rock from which you were hewn. Go back to the quarry from which you were dug. Remember where you came from? Not in a way like, you know, all the all the great stuff from you. I had a coach a rowing coach in college that when we looked like we were sort of getting tired, he would say call on your stars.

But if you look here,

the ancestors are not an unqualified positive thing. You mentioned two of them Abraham and Sarah. Sarah laughed at God. Abraham didn't quite trust God all the time. He threw Sara under the bus several times to save his own skin lying in the process.

So the rock from which we were hewn, the quarry from which we were dug, it is complicated. You have a whole family.

And they had a family and they had a family. The quote that I think really gets at this dynamic is

the way my favorite way it was put with Wordsworth and 1802 and a poem. So the child is father to the man.

The child is father to the man meaning who you were as a child, your background, your experience, all that influences who you are today. Another way of saying this is you are still 11 years old.

What you went through then,

is impacting you today. That line proved to be so I think powerful to describe the people what we experienced as human beings. The child is father to the man that it was quoted by the Jesuit Oxford priest Gerard Manley Hopkins in his poem a few decades later, and then it was picked up again by the Beach Boys in 1966. They have a song called child his father, the man picked

again by blood, sweat and tears in 1968, with their album, child's father to the man, this is a thing that we experienced you are an outgrowth of all this stuff.

And Isaiah says, Remember, the quarry from which you were dug, the rock from which you were hewn when you feel stuck. Remember where you came from, in a way that puts it into context. Many times when you feel stuck, and you're sort of in this thing, running in circles, there's some comfort in knowing that there's a reason you didn't lick it off a rock.

There's a context from which you come, that has made you who you are today, which might help you understand how God sees you. God sees you

as you are stuck, as you're running around in circles as you are in this situation.

And you feel like you're not making it, you feel you're you're not making the grade, you're not doing what has been asked of you. You're not fixing yourself for the people around you. And God knows that you are,

you are not starting out from a place of strength, and capability. He knows the rock from which you were hewn. He knows the quarry from which you were dug and all the stuff that was in it. I think going through human life, it's sort of like

a dunking contest. Like you just got to get this ball in the hoop.

The only thing is your pockets are full of rocks.

Remember where you came from, you're bringing all this stuff with you.

So there's a there's a compassionate sense in which the way God sees us and knows where we come from, and all the stuff that we have. And then the word of hope here in addition to that, the second thing that Isaiah says is this in verse five, I will bring near my deliverance. I will not stay on the sidelines, yelling helpful device, I will bring near my deliverance, I will come right to where you are. And this is we understand the hindsight of the millennia of Christian tradition and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is Isaiah talking about Jesus, I will bring near my deliverance, as Jesus says the Word of God is near you. He says that because he's right here,

bringing near his deliverance, which is to say where you live at your street address. This is what the incarnation of Jesus Christ is all about. God comes near you to where you actually are, to redeem humanity. And we talk about this a lot is on billboards, as you drive to Houston. It is something you heard in bible camp as a kid, Jesus died for your sins. It's on bumper stickers everywhere. And we think we know what that means. We think we know that that means there's a list of things you did wrong. And Jesus paid for all those things. He went to the customer service desk, and he said, I've got this bill that this other person has, I'd like to cover the bill. And the person says fine, and Jesus takes care of it. He pays for all your sins, He died for your sins. Yes. But there's more to that. him as a human being is the way God takes into God's own self, all this baggage, all the rock from which you were used all the quarry from which you were dug, your family background, your family tree, your whole situation, your system, your family of origin, takes all of that for all humanity into himself.

And redeems it. Because he takes all of that the rock from which we were hewn and he himself goes into a rock, freshly hewn his tomb is

cave. He takes all that into that place, and he leaves it there.

Now you may not feel that you may still have your pockets full of rocks, you may still have all the stuff that you came from. But what Isaiah 51 says, God knows, this invites you to know it too. And maybe give yourself a little grace and compassion. But also God in Christ comes near to you and retains all of that through the death and resurrection of God's Son Jesus Christ, to make you know, to move you from the waist places to the garden, to move you into Eden, as the passage says, to set you free. So what are we said,

people are stuck.

Your wheels spin. You don't get anywhere.

And God says two things. Remember the rock from which you are hewn. Be aware of the whole thing you came from.

And also know that God brings his deliverance near
in Christ to redeem all of you.

Past, present and future

Let us pray.

Dear God,

help us remember where we are from.

Help us to bring all of that to you, that you might redeem it.

We pray in Christ's name

Amen.

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