

Hey, we made it through January!

I want to tell you about MY January,
and then we're going to talk about Isaiah.

January is the busiest time of the year for me as your rector.

More than Xmas, more than Holy Week, January is my busiest season.

We finish gathering pledges in January and go right into building a budget
that needs to be completed by late January.

While that's happening I'm trying to let the staff know
about any changes in the new year,
which this year included bringing on a new staff person,
and we're also getting ready for the annual meeting,
which means new vestry members.

January wraps up with our vestry retreat,
which means the senior warden and I do
a lot of preparation and organization,
which is hard because only one of us is really good
at preparation and organization,
and we all know it's Cindy.

And all of that work is on top of the usual Holy Trinity stuff,
like worship, outreach, baptisms, and pastoral stuff.

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Now, it's an honor to have these responsibilities,
and a privilege to do this work with Cindy
and with this clergy, staff, and vestry.

But, by the end of the month the part of my brain that likes to
organize and plan and think strategically is fried and I'm like
Kevin Costner in Bull Durham when he finally retired from baseball.

"I don't wanna talk about nothin' and I don't wanna think about nothin'.
I just wanna be."

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Everybody has a January.

Everybody has that time of year when you're really busy.

Whether you have a paid job or a calling or a family responsibility,
or if you're just trying to get through your own life right now...
everybody has that time when your head
has taken in about as much as it can
and you don't wanna talk about nothin',
and you don't wanna think about nothin'...you just wanna be.

When that time comes - maybe you're in it right now, too -
what you probably want is not for those responsibilities to go away,
but to remember that there is a reality outside
whatever has temporarily taken over your life.

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So, if the responsibilities of life are overtaking you,
if the burdens you carry are filling you with resentment or self-pity...
friends, come with me to the 40th chapter of Isaiah
and the words that can get us out of our heads
and help us see the world from a new perspective.

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A voice says, "Cry out!"

And I said, "What shall I cry?"

Say this: "All flesh is grass."

Say, "The grass will wither, the flower will fade,
but the word of our God will stand forever."

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When you're tired, when life is hard, when your brain is full,
it's easy to think it's always going to be that way,
that the way life is going RIGHT NOW is how it's always going to be.

Therapists call that recency bias,
and Isaiah uses 4 simple words
to expose the lie of recency bias: "all flesh is grass."

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When I got done with the vestry retreat I was so excited about
what we'd accomplished in January,
but because I was tired I also gave into a little sin
I fall victim to every once in a while:
I found myself trying to EARN my salvation.

I know how wrongheaded that is, but a lot of us fall prey to that sin.

“If only I can give my children EVERYTHING they need...
if only I can FIX the broken relationships in my family...
if only I can SAVE my restaurant, BUILD my business,
heal my wounds, plan for retirement, lose weight...

IF ONLY I CAN MAKE MORE MONEY!

...then, THEN I will be worthy of the love that people have given me.
THEN I will DESERVE the salvation that God has already freely given.”

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But salvation belongs to God, not to me.

Salvation has nothing to do with my successes, or my failures.

Isaiah says, “Who was it that filled the oceans with water?”

“Who set the stars in the sky?”

“Who built the mountains and weighed them out on a scale?”

Was that you?

“Are you God's spiritual director?”

“When God decided it was time for the Big Bang,
were you God's project manager?”

No. Of course not.

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Our lives ARE important. You and I matter. We are loved.

The burdens and responsibilities that we try to carry
with honesty and integrity and love...

they matter. They do make a difference.

But we are small. We are very small,

and when we consider the reality and the grandeur of God,
these...things...that fill up our days are smaller still.

The nations of the world are a drop in the bucket of the world.

The great empires of the world are like the dust
that gets left on the scale of the universe.

And the nations are nothing compared to God.

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The other thing I do when I get tired is make an idol of my busy-ness.

I'm not the only one who does it.

Idolatry is still the most destructive of the sins.

“What kind of idol do YOU like to make?”

Isaiah asks this morning,

“What does YOUR false god look like?”

“Do you make it from the very best wood?

Do you cover it in silver and gold?”

That's how they made idols back in the day, but we're more subtle now.

We make an idol out of our work, out of our busy-ness.

At least that's what I do.

A lot of us make idols of our children these days.

Other people look to their homes, or their positions of status.

Astrology is making a comeback. That's an old-school idolatry.

Astrology is when you mistake the stars
for the one who put them there.

A lot of people make an idol out of Donald Trump.

Not everybody who supports him, of course, but it's a thing.

I don't think President Biden has been made into an idol,
but some of his supporters make a religion out of their political beliefs,
worshipping an ideal of purity without an ounce of grace in it.

And there I was in January, making an idol, funny enough,
out of my service to God.

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Why did I do that?

Why did I forget that our little projects and schemes,
our accomplishments and failures, our vanities and idols...
why did I forget how small it all is?

“God stretches out the heavens.”

“God places the stars in the sky.”

“God puts Nitrogen and Oxygen in the air for us to breathe.”

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Out accomplishments... Accomplishments are nothing.

Nations are nothing.

Babylon is nothing.

America is nothing.

“Scarcely does a person or a nation plant roots,” Isaiah says,
“before it withers and blows away.”

“And when the grass blows away, is God still God? Yes.”

Tennyson wrote, “Our little systems have their day,
They have their day and cease to be.”

Only God is everlasting. Only God makes gravity.
Only God puts Hydrogen and Oxygen come together
to give us water for our lives.

Only God.

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As for you and me...wait upon the Lord.

We all grow faint sometimes. We all get tired.

We all start to think that everything relies upon us.

“But those who wait upon the Lord,
they shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not grow faint.”

Amen.