

Isaiah 9:3

December 5, 2018

Perfect Resolution Sermon Series Hope Lutheran Church

“Hope For the Future” – Pastor Wayne Puls, Senior Pastor

It's great to have all of the Confirmation students together in church tonight. We have ___ youth in Confirmation this year. This is an awesome bunch of exceptional, fun, smart young Christians. Isn't that right, adult leaders and guides? They're excellent students, and I'm sure most of them do very well in school.

So try to imagine with me, Confirmation students, a kid in your grade at school, who's not such a good student. Imagine a kid named Alex who's the absolute worst student in the whole school. Alex's grades are awful. His personality stinks. Alex has no friends, and none of his teachers like him even a little bit. Alex is the most non-athletic, unartistic, non-talented kid in school. Can you imagine a kid like Alex?

Well, then, imagine one day this strange-looking guy comes walking up to Alex after school. He says, “Alex, I'm going to make you a promise. I promise you that you are going to become the smartest kid in school. You're going to get good grades in every class. Every kid in school is going to want to be your friend, and all your teachers are going to go crazy about you. You are going to become the school's best athlete, greatest artist, and most talented kid. Alex, I promise all this is going to happen to you!”

If you were Alex, would you believe that promise? How could you go from the very bottom to the very top? From worst to first? That promise seems impossible, doesn't it?

What happened to Alex, in our imaginary story, is a real-life, true story from the Bible. God's people were at the very bottom. They were hurting and desperate. Their tiny little

nation was in deep trouble. And then God sent a messenger with an incredible promise of change, of hope for their future.

The people to whom God sent this promise were the descendants of Abraham. We talked in Confirmation about God's covenant with Abraham. God promised Abraham, "I will make a great nation out of your descendants." Abraham had a hard time believing God's promise; but that promise actually came true. Abraham's descendants eventually became the nation of Israel, a little country to whom God promised big things.

But now, centuries later, this little country was in trouble. They had stopped listening to God; and, as a result, they were struggling and suffering. God's chosen nation was in bad shape.

First, the nation split in two. The northern kingdom, "Israel," had already been completely destroyed by the Assyrians. When our Bible story takes place, the southern kingdom, known as "Judah," was still alive; but they were weak, defenseless, and poor. The Babylonians were about to demolish them, and everybody knew it was going to happen soon.

So the people of Judah were at the very bottom. They had rejected God's help, and all their hopes and dreams were dead. They were scared, depressed, exhausted. Like Alex at school, everything was going wrong.

But then God sends a messenger, a prophet with an incredible promise of change, of hope for their future. Isaiah comes along, and he says to the people of Judah, "God wants you to know that a better day is coming! There's hope for your future! You may see nothing but darkness and despair all around you. But God's light is going to shine on your nation again! God is going to make your tiny little nation grow, and strengthen, and multiply! You're going to move

from fear to joy, from depression to excitement, from exhaustion to energy!”

What a fantastic promise! Do you think the people believed Isaiah? All they could see around them were invading armies, mass destruction, and economic ruin. Why should they believe Isaiah’s promise? Why should they trust God?

God’s promises aren’t always easy to believe. Not for the people of Judah long ago. Not for us, either. Sometimes all we see around us in the world is violence, heartache, poverty, warfare, racism, sickness.

We all want to feel joyful and energetic at Christmastime. But it’s hard sometimes. It’s a scary world we live in. There’s a lot to be afraid of out there. And there are plenty of hardships and failures in each of our lives, too. Our families aren’t perfect. Our relationships aren’t always so great. Our everyday lives are full of failures, and fiascoes, and flops. In our world, there is so much sin. In our souls, too, there is sin.

So sometimes it’s not easy for people like us to believe God’s promises. Sometimes we struggle to have any hope for our futures, just like the people of Judah back in Isaiah’s day.

And that’s why this promise from Isaiah is so important for us. That’s why we’re focusing on this prophecy in our sermon series. Because our God knows what our world is all about. Our God understands the sin in our lives. And our God wants us not to get lost in the darkness of this world. Our God wants us to have hope for our futures!

And he provides it in Christ. This promise from Isaiah is all about Christ. God wasn’t promising the people of Judah instant success, and worldly victories. God knew they were going to keep rejecting him. God knew the Babylonians were going to invade, and take the people of Judah off into exile.

But God never gives up on his people. “A day is still coming,” he promises them, “when my light is going to shine on your darkness. A day is still coming when your nation will be multiplied, when your joy will be increased.” God is talking about the day when his Messiah would come, when his Savior would bring salvation. God is promising the perfect resolution, in Christ, for the problem of sin in our hearts and sin in our world.

When the Son of God was born in Bethlehem, God wasn't just sending some temporary help for the people of Judah. The King of all kings and Lord of all lords was coming to save people everywhere from their sin. In Christ, God was “multiplying the nation” by calling all people – including you and me – to faith and forgiveness. In Christ, God was “increasing the joy” of his people, by giving us the joy of being forgiven, the joy of reconciliation with our God, the joy of eternal life, the joy of knowing that nothing in this world can ever separate us from God's love because of Christ. In Christ, we have hope for our future.

Listen again to Isaiah's words, God's promise to Judah and to you: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. ³ You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil.”

And may all God's people say, “Amen.”