

Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost

October 14 – 15, 2023

Jesus is the Death Eater

Isaiah 25:6-9

There comes a time in most everyone's life when we make a mistake so bad it negatively affects our lives in ways we would surely have avoided had we not made the mistake to begin with. Maybe we were a careless driver, and the resulting accident caused our insurance to go up, or the loss of our driving privileges, or even worse. Then, an advocate arises from the ashes of our destruction that helps us redeem some of the privilege or restores some semblance of our shattered lives. To us, they become a savior from the situation we've caused.

Or you made that fatal clerical error at the office that resulted in thousands, if not tens of thousands of dollars in loss, and the next trip to the manager's office is most certainly your last with your final check waiting for your arrival at their desk. Then, someone sidled up to you on the way and said they put your resume in at *Widgets and More Incorporated*. They knew you were a perfect fit for a job they were trying to fill. That friend becomes your beacon of hope on a bleak and hopeless day.

Or maybe you had the moment when you made a big mistake, and your kids came to visit...and they insisted it was time to give up the keys to the car. Living independently was no longer an option. Your future looked confusing, and uncertain, at best. Then, the one friend in your life that knows you better than any of your kids do, walked you through your options, emphasized your ongoing independence, and helped you to see the light at the end of the day's dismal tunnel. No, it's not what it was before; but, in a way unforeseen to you, it ends up being even better. Better than you imagined, at least, dare we say even a blessing. And you have that shining example of a friend who helped walk you through the process, leading you to a life you never realized was waiting for you.

Today, in our Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah, Yahweh is that friend and the Judeans made that mistake. Here they sat in Babylon knowing all too well, "Yup, we made the fatal mistakes. And the consequences are real - really awfully real!" Their mistake was longing after the Canaanite Gods like Ba'al and Mot.

We all know very well from the events of Exodus; a golden calf was worshipped while Moses was away on Mount Sinai receiving the commands of Yahweh. Ba'al was a God whose image was a bull. They may have been thinking they wanted Yahweh to give them what they thought

Ba'al promised - rain and good crops, plenty of grain and fertile flocks. Even though Moses ground up that golden calf and made them drink it mixed with water, they never forgot their longing for this image of a god. A god that just gave the people what they wanted. Their false worship persisted in offense to the One True God who always gave them what they needed. If getting what they wanted wasn't enough, and it never is, they finally degraded themselves to worshipping the worst of gods. That was the Canaanite god, Mot, the god who swallows his believers through death.

Isaiah specifically confronts this false god in our Prophecy today. The people bowed down to him, ironically honoring a god who promised them nothing more than death. Indeed, death came as a consequence of their adoration.

Most often you realize the consequence of your actions when the result of your actions is your imminent death. How many times have we held the hand of a loved one with death on the horizon directly attributed to tainted habits, reckless living, or unhealthy lifestyle choices? No one that drives recklessly should be surprised when their car is wrecked. "That's the consequences" we've all heard our parents and grandparents say; only we did not know that they were praying that the next consequence would *not* be death. Sometimes our actions lead us to death's bed quicker than we would have otherwise gotten there in God's good time.

One of my Professors at Seminary, God rest his soul, once responded to a classmate of mine who suggested it was pointless wearing a seatbelt because God only takes His children to heaven in His good time. Professor Eichmann replied, "How do you know He won't take you to heaven for being stupid enough not to wear your seatbelt?"

We do well to manage our lives carefully for the sake of Christ so we may live to share His Gospel.

Jeremiah 31:15 recounts the result of Judah's reckless worship of the God of Death.
"A voice is heard in Ramah
lamentations and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children;
she refuses to be comforted for her children,
because they are no more."

As the people of Judah were carried off into captivity, the Babylonian armies forced them on foot to Ramah, where thousands upon thousands died because of their forced march.

Isaiah comforts the forlorn former followers of the Canaanite god, Mot, with a promise of a feast that will swallow up the false god who swallows his followers through death. Isaiah promises redemption for the descendants of Rachel, whose memory was baptized by her tears. Through Isaiah, Yahweh promises that even though our duty to death has done us dirty, by the almighty hand of God our redemption is at hand. For Yahweh will save ALL humankind - the death that rules over everyone has been undone. Oh, Rachel, your loved ones you wept for in the death march, the ones that died in captivity without ever seeing home again, and those still living with the memories of their homeland dying before their eyes...THERE IS HOPE!

Many think that they are living today, but they are simply putting off dying!

With acronyms like YOLO (you lonely live once), lives are led in anticipation of inevitable death. So, eat, drink, be merry for tomorrow we die. And the Canaanite god, Mot, is raised in homage to a life lived with no hope of life beyond the grave, and little regard for the eternal consequences of their actions. To this reckless crowd, the Redeemer calls out for peace in their hearts and forgiveness for life led with many regrets.

When a young lady enters the Planned Parenthood clinic with a plan for her life without the baby in her womb, the doctor encourages her, serving as a priest of the Canaanite god, Mot. He worships the death of the living and the despair of a frightened girl.

A Godly community weeps over the death of the infants. They always seek to forgive the girl and work with her, so all the unborn may live to be baptized, catechized and ready to rise for worshipping the true God of life.

When generations of kids bow down to the tenants of secular humanism (because the potential of humankind and evolution of the world without the touch of our Creator's hands surely is how we will succeed as the human race), the philosophy of Mot is their end, because no matter what they do, they cannot cheat death. To them, the way, and the truth, and the life eternal comes not from their own ambition; but, from an ambitious God that makes them what they never dreamed they could be: corruptible creatures redeemed by their true creator.

Isaiah prophesies to them all today "Your life of death has been swallowed up and an eternal feast waits for God's eternal creations".

You only live once? Isaiah promises you will live forever.

Dr.'s of Death? Isaiah foreshadows baptized babies filling the pews with wails of praise to the living God!

Anthems of Atheists? Isaiah makes it clear, there is a God, He is YOUR God of life and eternal living to the fullest.

Matthew 2:18 picks up on the deaths in Ramah and ushers in the ultimate fulfillment of the undoing of Rachel's weeping.

On December 28th we remember the Holy Innocents that died, not only in Ramah, but also the male children in Bethlehem who suffered at the hands of the evil King Herod. In his attempt to murder our God, begotten of Mary, Herod worshipped unwittingly at the altar of the Canaanite god, Mot, making the death of the children his sacrilegious sacrament. But our God in the flesh would swallow up the Canaanite god, Mot. He would devour Herod's deviousness, wipe our tears of mourning with his nail-pierced hands, and conquer the most devastating implement of death the world had ever known. That cross would no longer be an implement of death, but rather the symbol for eternal life for all who gazed upon it and knew Jesus died for them there.

Our Jesus would eat the death Satan devised, bringing us, the living, eternal happy life with Him. If Mot was the death-giver, Jesus is the death-eater that has undeniably brought us to resurrection life in Him.

AMEN.

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