

Holding Hands With God
Isaiah 41:10-13

October 22, 2017

10 do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. 11 Yes, all who are incensed against you shall be ashamed and disgraced; those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish. 12 You shall seek those who contend with you, but you shall not find them; those who war against you shall be as nothing at all. 13 For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "Do not fear, I will help you."

I like this title "Holding Hands With God." I think it is a nice idea, the portrayal, the imagery, of holding hands with God. As if God reaches through the cosmos and takes your hand. Imagine you are a small child. And you are scared. Something is happening, there is some danger, crossing a street, unsteady on ice, a slippery hill, whatever. Your mom knows you are scared. She reaches down and takes your hand. When your parent holds your hand there is reassurance, there is calm, there is safety.

The Scripture portrays an image of reassurance, calm, and safety. It comes from God. Do not be afraid, God is with you. God will strengthen you, help you, and uphold you. The Scripture is concise. It is just the statement; just the facts. There is no show and tell; no demonstration of how this will happen. What it does is offer hope, comfort, and assurance.

Our Scripture reading today is from Isaiah. It was a time of high stress, anxiety, and crisis. The Jewish community was in a state of devastation. They were attacked by Babylonian armies, held captive, and sent into exile. Judah, their home, was in ruins. At a time like this many people have doubt and question the power of God. The Scripture is framed in an environment of despair. Judah has been destroyed by the Babylonian armies. So, the spirit of the people is hopeless, a state of shock, they are paralyzed and traumatized. This is the audience that Isaiah addresses. Isaiah presents God as dynamic – the triumphant trumpets blare – as God comes to the rescue.

God offers assurance, a promise of salvation, to the faithful community. The rival gods, they are false, they are nothing. Our God, the one true God, the only God, is the sole power in the universe. God is sovereign over all that exists. God rules over the heavens and the earth. God is exalted above all earthly powers. God is concerned with the people in their bondage. This God that I am talking about is almighty indeed. This God of Isaiah is the creator of the heavens and the earth. This God offers hope to people that are perplexed in adversity. This God, our God, the one and only God, reaches out – in love – to the people. Our God is an awesome God. Our God is a cosmic power, an active agent of social justice. Our God holds your hand and says "do not fear, I will help you."

The contemporary lesson is a matter of how the Scripture speaks to us today. Something is going to happen to you, good or bad, things happen to us all. Sometimes these things are terrific. Sometimes they are terrible. I was once in a nursing home and a lady kept hollering out "am I going to die?" Most people ignored her. She kept hollering out "am I going to die?" Some people tried to comfort her saying "no." But that didn't work. They did not give her comforting reassurance. I knew this was going on. When I walked by the lady hollers out "Am I going to die?" I said "yes you are!" People look at me – speechless – but I could read their faces. I knelt beside her and said "yes you are ... but not today. We are all going to die. The thing is to be ready. Are you ready? If you are ready there is really nothing to worry about.

The Scripture is not just words. It is not just something you learn in Sunday school and it is not something to be taken for granted. No matter what trials you go through in life you have a loving relationship with the divine. The Scripture paints a beautiful picture of comforting reassurance. God reaching through the cosmos holding your hand, helping you through the trials of life.

I mentioned a moment ago that the worst case scenario is death. Even in that dire situation we have the best case scenario. By the love of God, through the grace of God, we have God reaching out to us, through the cosmos, presenting us with a tremendous gift of love. God gives us Jesus. While this Scripture isn't about Jesus we can see in Jesus how this Scripture comes to life. We can see its realism; how God reaches out to us and holds our hands. With Jesus we have no fear for God is with us and strengthens us, helps us, and upholds us as we are holding hands with God.