



July 12 Rain

We are in that point in the summer (at least at the time of writing this) that the days of rain are few and far between. The grass is slowing. Just weeks ago, one could almost mow the lawn every day, or at least 2-3 times per week. Everything was growing. Grass. Weeds. Garden. Everything. The rain brought life with it.

Now, with a ban on watering the lawn, we see a different story. The once booming growth begins to slow, waiting for the rain to fall again. You start to realize just how important rain is. Nature knows the difference too. We have a rain lily. You can try to water it, but the only way it will bloom is with actual rain. It is as if the plant waits for that message from God and then shows its beautiful flowers as a sign of gratitude.

These words from Isaiah ring true. Rain brings life. It does not fall to the ground and not cause change. It brings growth where it touches. It nourishes and it does not come back empty. Talk to any farmer, gardener, anyone with a lawn or plants, and you will hear stories of this truth. You can try to get by with watering, but nothing brings life and growth like rain.

Why is it that when we think of the Word of God, we think differently? We start to ask if God is listening. We wonder why God is not answering. We wonder how God could allow the currently realities we face. When we look at it that way, we start to turn the Word of God into some sort of phantom force that we cannot see or understand. As we do, it is easy to get discouraged. We look around at all that is happening in the world and wonder where God is in all of this.

I wonder if these questions stem from our own impatience with God. We want to see sudden and definitive change. "Give me a sign?" is often synonymous with "This better be big." Maybe we would all do well to ponder God in terms of the example of Isaiah. Plants grow, but not in seconds or minutes. The growth is in hours, days, weeks, and sometimes even years. Each time it rains, there is a little more growth. You may not even see it, but over time that same seed will become what it is supposed to be.

Maybe our impatience is why Isaiah moves into verses 12 and 13. The prophet moves to liturgy, to worship. The prophet moves to the liturgical imagination. These words are spoken during the time of exile in Babylon. The people are under the thumb of an empire, longing to return home. The prophet promises that this return will happen, as sure as rain brings life to the earth. There will be a return, but before there can be any geographical departure there must be a liturgical, emotional, imaginative departure. In order to truly be free, they need to free themselves from the confines of their own broken imagination. The prophet reminds them that their worship is a place where they live into the values of the Word of God. Worship becomes that place where the rain causes growth, little by little, until the world around them mirrors the liturgical imagination of the people.

Some wonder why it is important to gather in worship. There is truth that you can meet with God anywhere. You do not need a community of faith to feel connected with God. What we do in worship is not only about feeling connected with God. It is about the liturgical imagination and the collective work toward a better future, one that mirrors what we do here.

Where in the world would we find such a group of people? Where? Where in the world do we find a place where all are welcome? Where else would we have the courage to sing together, pray together, eat together, as one people?

The truth is that the world is broken. It is mean at times. The impact of the empire is all around us. The world tries to tell us what to like, who to accept, what to believe, and that it just has to be this way. But not here. This is the place where we practice. This is the place we build faith, where we strengthen our convictions, where we train to restore a broken world through the Word of God. It will not return empty. God guarantees it. Amen.