

Sermon 2-4-2018
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
Isaiah 40
By
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There is a national pastime that we don't talk about very much, but everyone loves to engage in. It seems like everywhere you turn, people are doing this, or talking about someone else doing it. It probably gets more radio time than all sports radio stations combined. We love it in the bar. We love it at work. We love it in the church. We love it on the highways. We just can't get enough of it. Of course, that national pastime is complaining. From the biggest issues, to the smallest annoyances, we want to complain about it. Sometimes, it is almost as if we would rather have the situation stay the same than be fixed, because then we'd still be able to complain about it.

But complaining, as we see in our Old Testament reading from Isaiah, is not just a national pastime, it's a human pastime. In verse 27, God is asking why Jacob, also known as the people of Israel, are complaining. To the Israelites perspective, they probably have a lot of reason to complain. At this time, they have been undergoing enormous suffering because of the Babylonian exile. They have been separated from the land that was promised to them, many of them have been killed in horrific ways, and they have been forced to live in a place they don't want to be. It seems that if anyone has

reason to complain, it would be the Israelites. And what are the substance of their complaints? They sound familiar to anyone who has prayed about anything over the years: God doesn't see me. He doesn't care.

Because our complaints and our world are just the same as the complaints and the world of the Israelites. The things that frustrate us, especially the big things, make us wonder if God actually cares about us at all. The diseases that ravage our system, the betrayals that rock our relationships, the cultures that denigrate and dismiss our lives and our faith, they all seem to be saying to us, "Nobody cares. There is nothing and no one out there that wastes a single minute thinking about your insignificant problems." And we don't want to hear that. We want to know that we are seen. We want to know that we are heard. We want to know that we are cared about. And the world sure doesn't give us that.

But God does. And that's exactly what Isaiah is telling us. We think that God doesn't care because our eyes are mixed up. We keep looking at the wrong things. We look to the reactions of people and the world to figure out if anyone cares about us. We *should* be looking to the one who runs this whole show. And that's what Isaiah is focusing on in verses 21 and 28. Do you not know? Have you not heard? You've already got all the most important information you need. And there are two ways it's been given to you. First, look at the world that surrounds you. Look at the stars, the mountains, the rivers, the very ground you walk on. He is

strong and powerful enough to take care of you in your times of need.

However, Isaiah even gives us the other side of that coin. He who is powerful enough to do that is also powerful enough to blow away the rulers of this world with a blast from his nostrils. Part of that is comforting, that he can do that to the most powerful people of this earth, but it's also unnerving, because he could do that to *us*. Our minds would want to complain that he *is* doing that to us, because he's the one with the power. That's when we have to make the shift. We shift from the eyes to the ears. We shift from the creation to the Creator. We shift from "Do you not know" to "Have you not heard?" You don't know that God gives strength to the weary by looking at a mountain. You don't know that God increases the power of the weak by playing in a river. That's why the ultimate answer to our complaining is to receive the word of God in our ears again.

That Word goes against most everything we see, hear, or complain about. God's Word declares that even to the point of death, there is nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ. He is the one that makes us soar, even when we feel like a rock on the ground. He is the one that lifts up from our low times. He has done this in many ways, but in our days, he does this through the person and work of his Son Jesus Christ. He lifts you up by being lifted up himself, onto his cross. It is there that he takes what ultimately weighs you down, your sin, and replaces it with soaring eternal life. And that is life here, too. So when we begin to complain, or get

frustrated, or hurt, don't look at the situation, look to the creation, and look to the Creator, because he has the word that will lift you up. AMEN.