

Life Sunday Sermon 2016

Isaiah 43:1 “Granddad’s Diamond Mine”

Rev. Michael Salemink, Executive Director, Lutherans For Life

www.lutheransforlife.org

I’d *love* a diamond mine. *You’d* love a diamond mine. A diamond mine solves about any problem. A diamond mine relieves almost any pain. Suppose your granddad left you a diamond mine. Suppose his attorney arrived at your door and delivered you the deed to Granddad’s diamond mine. Granddad prospected the claim *himself* way back when. He shoveled out the shafts with his own bare hands. He explained he had located the biggest, brightest diamond ever discovered on earth, but he left it embedded, buried somewhere in there, because he wanted *you* to have it (along with all the other littler ones, of course).

Maybe his remaining days were insufficient for him to enjoy it. Maybe his haste would risk fracturing it. So he attached a photograph to verify its thousands of carats worth millions of dollars. It’ll provide for you the rest of your life. It’ll meet needs for generations of your own grandchildren. How much searching would be worth it? Six months in that mine? How much work would it be worth to you? A couple years? How much hurting would you put up with to have it? A decade or so of excavating? How much waiting would you be willing to invest? Half a lifetime or more? How much dirt would you sift? Tons or hundreds of tons? How much distance would you crawl and climb? Miles or dozens of miles? Wouldn’t just setting eyes on that diamond heal any hardship? Wouldn’t laying hands on your own basketball-sized gemstone undo all the ugliness? Think of all the good you could do with it! Think of all the lives it would change!

Isaiah’s Israel looks like a diamond mine. Isaiah’s Israel resembles an old, abandoned diamond mine. What started out as the Promised Land has ended up pillaged and stripped (1:7). What began as the Vineyard of the Lord (5:1ff.) has become barren wilderness (40:3). The fertile earth that once flowed with milk and honey now lies stagnant, overrun with floods and fires

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(43:2), drunk on blood and gorged on fat (34:7). Sinfulness like scarlet and deep, dirty-clay crimson (1:18) has crumbled kingdom and countryside down to a dust-and-rubble-covered land of darkness (9:2). Worms (41:14), serpents’ eggs, and spider webs (59:5) have reduced forests to stumps (11:1), fields down to briars (7:23-25), and withered grass and faded flowers (40:6-7) clear down to rugged places (40:4). God has to name a man of unclean lips living among a people of unclean lips (6:5) as his sole prophet. Lord God has to anoint one marred beyond human semblance (52:14), without beauty or majesty, from whom men hide their faces (53:2-3), as His last servant. The people are remnant (10:19-22), just discarded scraps, and even all their righteous acts are filthy rags (64:6).

They used their diamonds for battle instead of beauty. Abraham’s grandchildren used their riches to shear instead of shine. They fell into a pattern of wielding their specialness and preciousness as weapons, for comparing and competing. They formed the habit of showing off their treasures and keeping score by their possessions. Brothers descended into bickering. Neighbors escalated disagreements into hostile conflict. Orphans had to beg for bones. Widows were made to cry alone. Lonely ladies committed adultery with another woman’s husband. Lusty men carried out acts of sexual immorality with someone else’s daughter. Merchants cheated. Workers stole. Politicians oppressed. Citizens rebelled. They ate for indulgence and drank to excess. They imitated unbelievers and ignored the covenant. So broken does Isaiah describe them that you’d conclude no diamonds reside within anymore. It appears Isaiah’s Israel is just clods of dirt all the way to the core.

We’re pretty good at that. We’ve gotten really good at it. What a helpful skill we have! Our world has well prepared us to gemologically analyze lives. Our culture has equipped us for

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declaring which people ought to be abandoned and condemned before they contaminate or collapse. You and I regularly demonstrate the uncanny ability, indeed the innate gift, of identifying who just doesn’t harbor any more diamonds inside, if ever there were worth and not simply dirt within them to begin with. Sex offenders, suicide bombers, greedy CEOs, and smug bureaucrats do not beautify our communities, do they? Unapologetic alcoholics, abortion providers, gay advocates, and outspoken atheists do not enrich or enhance our existences, do they? Reckless drivers, unruly children, illegal immigrants, whiners, lowlifes, and leeches – our culture declares they don’t count as much as others. Can unborn babies with birth defects or unresponsive patients with brain damage matter the same way we do when they don’t accomplish anything of benefit?

We make effective prophets. We see sin’s signature with precision. It’s because we’ve perfected our craft on ourselves, isn’t it. Way down we know we’re no better than them. We’ve witnessed the sin within us and assume we and they are alike. Everywhere we look there’s filth, even inside. Everything we touch turns to it because we view reality not with diamonds in our eyes but with darkness in our hearts. Our conscience accuses, convicts, and sentences us constantly. We give up on others because we’ve already given up on ourselves. So we establish our value at everyone else’s expense. And we spew manure to siphon their shine. But we don’t exactly belong in jewelry stores, either. Every diamond mine we dynamite just cakes more mud on our own faces. Blood does build up on our hands, even if only a little bit at a time, until we are also clod to the core.

Then again, a diamond mine *always* looks like a dump. Greater diamonds come with greater dirt. Gemstones only differ from gravel because of what they reflect. Precious jewels are

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just pebbles someone paid a lot for and takes really good care of. Appearances aside, the Almighty God of Israel has not abandoned his diamond mine, no matter whoever else does. “But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.’” Heavenly Father has created, redeemed, and called a three-times-priceless humankind. It is His nature and He makes it His way to enter our darkened earth. Maker sends forth His beloved and only-begotten Son into this sinful world. Alpha and Omega incarnates Himself in human flesh, as fragile infant, citizen of Israel, and descendant of Abraham—one of them and one of us. Jesus the homeless peasant but holy pilgrim becomes condemned criminal crippled by the cross. Bearing the dirt and the hurt and the wait, carrying out the search and the work, Christ our canary is buried to spare me and spare you and us all.

God-made-human-flesh in Christ proves the worth in all people. God-crucified-as-Jesus puts the value in people. Resurrected Savior has emerged alive again and forever from the depths of death and sin and hell, holding for us the most precious treasure: everlasting life, human immortality in the heavenly kingdom with the household of God. *This* grace, traced on *every* human being from the invisible miracle of conception to the moment of natural death, reflects the Father’s own face and His very heart upon and within our shared humankind, even when our conduct does not reflect it. Not just any diamond do we find in the mines, but Granddad Himself. God has created, redeemed, and called us in His own image. And what sin within us has warped, Father’s Only-Begotten is restoring, forgiveness declared is restoring. Holy Trinity resides in all who believe and are baptized. In the image of Father, Son, and Spirit, He makes us male and female, husband and wife, marriage and family and children, more than one but one-ified. To be

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loved and to love, in God’s Son and with each other, this is the unique dignity and unequalled sanctity every human being receives upon entering this world and retains into eternity.

As much as *Jesus* amounts to, so you do too. The same that *you* matter then, *everyone* does. You matter to God, Maker of heavens and earth, King of creation, and Lord of the universe, especially when you are labeled with His name and marked with His lifeblood by faith, Word, and sign. Father’s love, for Son’s sake, by Spirit’s grace bespeaks the lifeless *endless*, bespeaks the worthless *priceless*, and bespeaks the unusable *unlosable*. He who created, redeemed, and called, still creates, redeems, and calls—and ever will—not only you but every embodied mortal soul besides. They all exist as gifts to you, provided as not just diamonds but diamond mines, each a one-of-a-kind find. God has embedded pieces of heaven itself in them for you and for so many more, however broken, brittle, gouged, and jagged they may be.

Sex offenders, suicide bombers, CEOs, and bureaucrats are neighbors-in-waiting. Abortionists, activists, atheists, drunks, and bums are the brothers you never knew you had and the sisters you couldn’t live without. Reckless, unruly, illegal are buried treasures. Lusty, lonely, lowlifes, leeches, merchants, and workers are hidden gems. Whiners, widows, orphans, babies with birth defects or labeled just fetuses, convalescents, quadriplegics, incurables, and even you and me are worth whatever degree of search, work, and hurt must be endured to discover that geode. You get to take part in the mining, sometimes a little digging and dusting, sometimes a lot of lifting and rinsing. Even these labors God includes you in as privileges not punishments. Lutheransforlife.org outlines countless ways. Let them equip you for the Gospel adventure. Help them equip others as well. In forgiveness’s faith and compassion’s relationships you—yes, we all—will know life and take hold not only of Granddad but even of God. Amen.