



Reflection from Ed Lane

Isaiah seems to be a bit confused as to what his assignment is. Aren't prophets supposed to be telling us, "Clean up your act, young man/woman, or you're gonna get a spanking"? The disciplinarian - it's a tough job, but somebody has to be the adult here. But then Isaiah comes out of nowhere and says, "Comfort, give comfort to Jerusalem. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem that her service is at an end, that her iniquity is expiated." Why the shift of message and of tone?

A little checking, and it turns out Isaiah is talking to a totally demoralized, defeated population of Jews in exile in Babylon. The ones who wrote "By the streams of Babylon we wept - we hung up our harps. How could we sing the Lord's songs in a strange land?" Ninety percent of the population of Israel had fled, been killed, or had been taken into exile. These were people who needed a ray of hope, and Isaiah is answering that need.

It's hard to be as hopeful as we'd like: Israel/Gaza Strip/Hamas; Ukraine/Russia; racism/USA; desperate refugees/US borders; Taliban/Afghanistan, for starters. Maintaining hope becomes a Herculean task with not too many sessions with the evening news, to the point where we have to turn it off.

Is Isaiah believable to us in this screwed-up world? Can we be comforted? I can't answer that question for anyone else. But I take Isaiah at his word: I must have hope, and my faith makes me take comfort. My iniquity has been expiated on the Cross, and I can say with my Jewish friends, "Next year in Jerusalem!"

Peace,

Ed