

## **You Keep Using that Word**

Isaiah 62:1-5

Psalm 36:5-10

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It's been a hard week to be a Christian and not have your head explode.

This week a Christian minister...averged not only that every Muslim refugee is a potential radical terrorist...but he suggested that letting ANY muslim refugees into the US, even after the typically 3 year long vetting process...was like continuing to drink milk in an e coli outbreak or like his decision to eat squirrel meat...something we would inevitably regret...

A professed Presbyterian this week suggested without a hint of irony that we should consider closing mosques and making Muslims register with the government in some way...

And finally two other loudly professing Christians suggested that we might be able to accept Refugees....but only if they are Christians....because Christians would not be a risk....and every muslim would be...

Every one of those Christian politicians justified their positions based on the safety of the American people and our economic interests. Safety. We keep using that word...

Sometimes I think there are two kinds of people in the world...(and since it's youth Sunday, a word of wisdom to the young people, never trust anyone who says there are only two kinds of people in the world...but work with me for a second...) the two kinds of people I'm talking about are first, those who when they saw the title of today's sermon...You keep using that word, immediately thought about the movie "The Princess Bride" and second those who have no idea what I'm talking about.

The Princess Bride is one of those cult films everyone should see at least once...a post-modern fairy tale movie that packs in a lot—it's a story of love, adventure, pride, sword fights, kidnappings, a beautiful princess, a hateful prince, pirates,

rodents of unusual size...and, of course, a happy ending...what's not to like, right?

There is a running joke early in the movie...Vezini, a kidnapper, played to smarmy perfection by Wallace Shawn, thinks he has planned the perfect crime in kidnapping the heroine...but time and again his companions point out something that appears to be going wrong... and every time...he says... "inconceivable"... but then it's always true...and so eventually—after the 6th or 7th "inconceivable" thing proves to be very true—one of those companions says to him "you keep using that word...I do not think it means what you think it means."

Today's two main texts and the current political and global climate invite us to consider a word we use a lot...it's there in both of these texts..

Let's start with the Psalm. The opening portions of today's text are a love letter to God...highlighting all of the most wonderful things about this Yahweh we call Lord...first we remember Yahweh's steadfast love—a love that never fails or falters...then we sing of God's faithfulness, and the goodness and righteousness and wise judgments of the Maker of the Universe... And we even get praises sung to the One who is a refuge for all people, the Lord of abundance and welcome. But at the very center of this love note is a simple phrase...You save humans and animals alike. It's as though that is the heart of God's very being, the center of God's will...to save. The Hebrew word there is a form of the word...*yesha*...to save, to deliver.

This God who is so wonderful, who saves is easy to worship...a God who is all anyone could ever hope for in a God... the light of the world...

And then...and then you get to verse 10...and the song of praise becomes a request...not uncommon in the Psalms...and what is that request to the God who is a refuge to everyone who saves humans and animals?

O God...please continue your steadfast love for those who know you...please offer your "*yesha*" power, your salvation only to those who are righteous...

Wait, what? Is something missing there...we go from the God whose steadfast love is declared as expansive as the eternally

vast heavens...to a request that Yahweh only love, only save the people who already know Yahweh...

It just doesn't fit does it? It doesn't quite compute...that the God who is worshipped in the first four verses of this Psalm would heed the exclusive request that seems to sour the whole passage. This seems particularly inconsistent with the God who Paul acknowledges in today's New Testament lesson...acts to give different gifts and talents and abilities and capacities for understanding but honors all equally without a hint of favoritism intended in this gift or that one...

How could it be that the writers of the Psalms would dare to suggest that God favors those who know Yahweh...like them...and those who seek righteousness...like them? How could it be they could ask that such blessings only be offered to people just like them...oh wait...

Doesn't that sound oddly familiar...oh, we can offer the blessing of safety from death and famine and war...but only to people who are just like us...

And then there is that passage from Isaiah. This is from the time after the exile. The sons and daughters of those who were carted off to Babylon are back...but things aren't going so well. They continue to be the plaything of every world power that surrounds them...Indeed...it will be true of Israel for the 600 years that lead up to Jesus' time on earth...

But this passage also uses that word...the prophet proclaims that it is God's will that the people be vindicated...that is that they no longer be oppressed and belittled...and that they experience salvation...another form of that YESHA word again.

It's a text that has been used to demonstrate God's particular love for Zion/Jerusalem...the metaphoric stand ins for the community that are the heirs of Abraham and Sarah....Willing the salvation of the people is a way tradition has said that God demonstrates the chosen-ness of the Hebrew people.

Some today still use that as an argument for pro-Israeli policies...that somehow the 1948 creation of the nation of Israel is a manifestation of that ancient promise of God re-enacted following the Holocaust. That our collective global horror at the consequences of centuries of anti-Semitism and statelessness

was somehow the mechanism that God used for the salvation of the Jewish people in the creation of Israel.

Not very many Israeli's believe that—only the most conservative Zionist parties...and not many Christians profess that...except for those who see Israel and a step toward the so-called rapture and tribulation....

The Reality is that the religious kingdom of Israel from the old testament has little or nothing to do with the secular state carved out of the middle east by the UN in 1948. And I want to suggest that Isaiah's poetic expectation of Yahweh's restoration and salvation of the people after the exile is not about God rescuing God's favorites...but about God's responding to the cries of oppression and disgrace with transformation.

Salvation, saving, safety...

They are powerful words..because they are immediately personal. Who doesn't want our children to be safe, who doesn't want to save the person or the animal in peril. Go to Youtube sometime...a video of an animal or a person being saved from peril will almost always go viral. It's in our DNA...this idea of saving, being saved...

It's certainly the motivation for much of what we do. In 2014, when Israeli forces launched Operation Protective Edge, invading Gaza and bombing to rubble a wide swath of buildings along the border, killing over 2100 Palestinians....even Israel admitted that more than half were civilians or those who could not be definitively identified as combatants. Hundreds were children. Israel said it was necessary to stop the rockets being launched into Israel from Gaza...rockets that killed only seven Israelis, but caused many to live in fear.

Safety is also, apparently, the motivation for 31 governors stating they don't want Syrian refugees in their states....despite a typically 3 year long process of interviews and vetting of refugees being resettled in the US.

But will refusing to save families fleeing the tyranny of Assad or the persecution of ISIS make us any safer? Or will it potentially motivate those who are hopeless to be recruited by those very oppressors? Has that buffer zone in Gaza made Israel or Palestine any safer? Ask the 10 Israeli families who are mourning and the

10 who are tending to the wounds of those who have been victims of stabbings on the streets of East Jerusalem in recent weeks. Ask the 77 Palestinians who have died in the last few months as Israel has again cracked down.

I want to suggest that today's passages provide us with an answer if we look deep in them. The psalmist reminds us that God saves...but it is in the midst of recalling how God loves all... how God is a refuge for all. The promises of salvation in Isaiah are to a people who are living under the oppression of occupying forces...

What if these two texts remind us that if we seek our safety by denying the inherent worth and equal value before God of all of humanity...not just those just like us...or if we seek our safety through the oppression of others...we are NOT going to experience the Yesha...the salvation...the deliverance from evil that is God's will for us all.

What if these two texts are a reminder that before God... there is no such thing as exceptionalism, American or otherwise, that entitles one people to thrive, to be safe, if it comes at the cost of the safety, value, or liberty of others?

What if God's will for us is not that those who are just like us will be saved from whatever earthly or eternal perils we can imagine...but what if God's will is instead that all be safe...that all experience deliverance from evil....AND that any effort at safety that is built on the oppression of others or the denial of their status as the beloved of God is doomed...

What if God's will is not to condemn any part of the world to oppression or violence but is instead to save the whole world...

What a minute...that sounds familiar doesn't it...  
John 3:17—"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

You already know who said that....We call him Jesus....we're about to spend a month celebrating that he came to save the world...

But today...it's worth remembering...that Jesus...is an anglicized version of a *Iesus*...the greek translation of

*Yeshua*....the proper name version of that word we keep using...  
Savior...Deliverer...

Thanks be to God.