

**Everlasting Father  
Third in an Advent Series  
Isaiah 9:2, 3-7**

**And he shall be called...everlasting father  
Dec. 13, 2020  
Pastor Jenothy Irvine**

**Prayer - Like a mother or father teaches their children, teach us again, for the very first time, or in a way we have not heard, what it means to call you by the name, Everlasting Father. May your Spirit speak - may we listen. Amen.**

**Message**

**I sat down at the dining room table to work on today's message. It was fairly early in the evening but it was already dark outside. The sun shone bright throughout the day, warming all it touched, but now the air was cold and crisp. I put the rumba vacuum to work, lit a frasier fir scented candle, bumped the furnace up a degree, and sat down to write. The words however, didn't come. The phrases were stuck. The page remained empty. I was distracted, unsettled, and wrestling with various thoughts and emotions. Perhaps dinner would help.**

**This may come as a surprise to you, but when the boys are with their dad, the house is empty, and it's just me and the dogs, I love to cook. For me, there is nothing like whipping up a mean bowl of raisin bran crunch or special K chocolaty delight. Nothing beats a hot bag of popcorn I don't have to share, or as was the case this particular night, a hearty bowl of maple and brown sugar quick oats. Cereal after all, is a complete meal. Popcorn is an appetizer, main course, and desert all in one. Oatmeal is, well, oatmeal. It's called comfort food. Food that fills me up, reminds me of simple pleasures, helps me feel better, soothes the emotional chaos inside, and seems to settle the dust of the moment.**

**I wonder what your comfort food is? I wonder what would be comfort food for the soul? What would fill the emptiness inside you? What would warm our hearts when the world around us seems cold and indifferent? What**

**might soothe our hurt places, light up the shadowy places, and offer hope when we are weary or frustrated. The prophet Isaiah has the answer and it has been in front of us for the past three weeks now.**

**We can't get much better, more fulfilling, or hope-filled words than Isaiah 9:2, 3-7; these words of proclamation warm your heart when the world is fractured. They sooth our hurt places, shed light upon the shadows, and offer hope in the midst of confusion and despair.**

**Today, I invite you to feast again on these words of promise, and hope. Let them be comfort food for your soul. Let them fuel your mind and sustain your being.**

#### **Read text**

**I am no history buff, nor do I pretend to be. However, to know even a little bit of the history leading up to this text, makes it all the more satisfying and complete. It's like gathering all the ingredients to make the dish complete. So allow me to cover several hundred years of history in just a few minutes.**

**When the children of Israel exited Egypt under the leadership of Moses he took them as far as the border of the promised land, Palestine and then, per God's direction, Joshua took it from there. Joshua divided up the land into twelve portions, like states, or counties and assigned those portions to the twelve tribes of Israel.**

**Remember, God issued the promise to Abraham and Sarah that they would become the mother and father of a great nation, from which all the world would be blessed. It began with their first two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael is the father of the Arab nations, and because they were not the inheritors of the promise, they have been at war with the sons of Isaac ever since.**

**Isaac was the son to whom God continued the promise to make a great nation and Isaac and his wife, Rebekah, had two sons, Esau and Jacob.**

**According to ancient Near Eastern legal code, when a father died, his property was divided into equal shares based on the number of sons he had, plus one; the eldest son inherited two portions and the rest of the sons one. Jacob, not the first born, but the second of Isaac's sons, whose name means, usurper, tricked his older brother out of the inheritance due him. Jacob in fact developed a habit of usurping or sub-planting and it became a kind of lifestyle for him. But God had a promise to keep and a nation to restore. God knew Jacob needed to change. \*music**

**One night, the angel of the Lord came to Jacob and wrestled with him all night in what has become known as perhaps the greatest wrestling match of all time. When it was over, Jacob's name was changed to One who wrestled with God, which in Hebrew, is "Israel." The people of God...Israel - those who wrestle with God.**

**Jacob, now called Israel, had twelve sons and those sons had more sons (and daughters) til eventually the clans of those sons and daughters formed a great nation. Out of that nation, the Christ-child was born.**

**Two of those sons settled in the northern regions of Israel and flourished for about 600 hundred years until the time of, guess who? Hint, we are reading his words today. Yes, until the time of the prophet Isaiah, when the Assyrian army came, invaded their land, and brutally took over their region and settled non-Jewish people there.**

**The prophet Isaiah lived in the southern part of Israel, during a time when the northern part was being chewed up and forced to live under Assyrian rule. It was a scary, uncertain, and dark time in Israel's history. God needed someone to speak a word of hope.**

**During the first half of the book of Isaiah, God addresses the nation of Israel to warn them about this war and how to cope with it. During the second half of the book, God addresses Israel about the aftermath of the war. Two sections - one about how to live before hope comes and one on how to live now that hope has come.**

**Now, take all those ingredients, layer them together, and you have the makings of an incredible plate of the soul food we taste today. And what is it that holds it together? Or should I say, who is it? Who was there from beginning to end and everywhere in between? What was the name given to the one who loved Israel beyond measure even when they wrestled against that love? Who stuck by Israel's side through the wild places; through trauma, uncertainty, persecution, famine, illness, oppression, and defeat?**

**Everlasting Father.**

**We know God cannot be contained in a single name. We know that God is not limited by gender. We know the qualities and characteristics of God cannot be confined to language alone.**

**Why Everlasting Father? Because the people of God were living in shaky and frightening times and needed something they could cling to; someone they could depend on then and for all time. God, in Jesus was and is eternal - everlasting.**

**The people of God were living in chaotic times and needed something they could count on; someone they could depend on to guide them. A father figure if you will. God in Jesus became that figure and more. How can the one to come - the child to be born be a father? Jesus carried on the father figure image. He was the connecting link between God and God's people. As he grew, he cared for people. He nurtured the sick. He prayed for people. He was there for all people, even the ones no one wanted or cared about. He was wise in counsel, mighty in love, and modeled how we are to live with and for others.**

**Fathers if they are to be anything in the lives of their children, they are to do certain things and hold certain places in their lives. Fathers ought to: believe in their children, be firm but loving, provide a place and sense of identity for their children, and think about and plan for their future. Study the life of Jesus, and you'll find someone who believed in people. Look at Jesus' interactions and you'll see He handled people firmly but with love.**

**Listen to the voices of believers and you will know they find their place and identity in a long line of believers. Jesus said, “I am going to prepare a place for you.” He also gave the assurance that we would never be alone; the advocate, the holy spirit would be with us always. In all these ways, God in Jesus provided the father figure the people of Israel needed...that we need.**

**The words of Isaiah were recorded and written in a patriarchal system and in a time when they would not be heard otherwise. Today, we know that some people do not have a positive father figure or a good relationship with their own father. We know that not all children (adults for that matter) can relate to God as father due to things like abuse, violence, or the cycle of addiction at the hand of their biological father. Today we know that for many, it is the mother, grandmother, aunt or older sister, not the father, that provides and protects, is firm but loving, and looks out for and gives stability to those in their care.**

**Throughout the bible, God’s everlasting love, protection, and guidance are illustrated in multiple ways; a mother hen protecting her chicks, a mother bear guarding her cubs, a shepherd watching his flock, a father welcoming his son, a mother nursing her young. It is the parental aspect of God that is important to understanding the words of Isaiah. It is God as our parent; our nurturer, protector, comforter, and provider that was fulfilled in the life and teaching of Jesus.**

**Do you hear the shift in Isaiah’s tone? The focus of his proclamation turns from political to personal. He announces that the coming king will turn political power on its head as Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God, AND he will also provide firm but loving guidance with a nurturing hand. The coming king will provide a sense of place and identity for a fractured and hurting people, and he will be there for Israel and for us no matter what.**

**As we take another step toward the manger, may we find comfort, hope, and peace knowing who it is we will meet there. From everlasting to everlasting. Amen.**