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Sent For The Future

As I was preparing for the marathon a couple weeks ago I decided that my strategy was going to be “whenever I thought of how fast I was going, I was going to intentionally slow down.” I wanted to run slow. Once the race began, that worked out for me. There was one temptation though. There were a lot of people ahead of me, and even though I’m not a very competitive person, every once in a while I would wonder, “how many people are behind me?” I would feel the urge to look back while I was moving to check to make sure there were at least a few people slower than me. The problem is looking back throws you off balance, takes your eyes off of what is ahead, and slows you down. You know this even if you are not a runner. Looking back is a lot like looking inward. Curving inward. There is so much going on ahead of us that we miss out on. Like God’s activity.

As we hurdle towards another presidential election, I know I’m not the only one who sometimes looks back longingly at the past and a simpler, more civil time in our civic discourse. I’ve got nostalgia for a west wing esc past which is maybe an illusion.

The past can hold us captive. In its enrapturing sway we can feel trapped and stuck.

It could be regrets that you cannot stop obsessing about. Maybe it is a conversation that replays in your mind a million times a night. Missed opportunity as a parent, at work, or with a neighbor. You wish you could have a do-over because they keep you from embracing the present, let alone the future. Sin does the same. Guilt and shame build fences around us and we believe that we are defined by some past action or inaction. Nothing will change. We glance backward.

Or you just wish you could go back to before things fell apart.

For me, I look back to when some relationships of mine weren’t marred by ideological differences and distance that severed bonds I thought were unbreakable. Those were the days.

Isaiah is caught up in a vision. A high and lofty throne, seraphs, smoke, shaking foundations. A chorus of holy, holy holy. Those details aren’t the ones that stop me in my tracks. It is how the episode continues. Opens up. Isaiah is forgiven and sent out. Having encountered God he is placed on the move.

The One who invites Isaiah into the future is the one who we call Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Fully revealed for us as the crucified one outside the city who gives himself in love for the whole world. A love so expansive it includes galaxies and countless species, trees, forests, mountains, oceans, and a love so personal that it is for you and me.

As we will sing, “Come, see the face of Trinity, newborn in Bethlehem; then bloodied by a crown of thorns outside Jerusalem. The dance of Trinity is meant for human flesh and bone; when fear confines the dance in death, God rolls away the stone.” This God meets us with unilateral forgiveness. Our path no longer obstructed, raised up, we are sent on head - like Isaiah and like this God who is ever in motion. From shut tombs, closed rooms, locked doors- out.

Today Charlotte will be baptized in the triune name. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit traced over her body. She will die the only death she ever needs to fear and will be placed into the risen life of Christ that will greet her every new morning. God speaks to her and to all the baptized: you are forgiven. You belong. You are sent. Look ahead. Christ meets you there. The Spirit lives in you. You have been welcomed into the spacious dwelling of the living God. Stretch out!

I recently learned from Dr. Barbara Rossing that in one sermon Luther suggests that the Hebrew word for Spirit can be translated as undaunted, bold, courage. The triune name now traced over your body is like a compass orienting you to the future. In this place sorrow, grief, and pain are not ignored. We do not speculate about a God orchestrating events for some greater good. No. We meet a God who enters fully into your vulnerability and death and whose love insists on going on and greeting you on the other side with resurrection life. Trinity equals promise proclaimed.

Where might Undaunted, Bold, Courage be inviting us, Grace? Look ahead. Who has cracked open a glimpse of possibility for you that you were not able to imagine? A friend, someone who has experienced a similar loss, or crisis, a therapist? Who has embodied faithfulness that didn't get tripped up with glances backward? A teenager, mentor, neighbor? What activity of God might we join if we keep our eyes on the road?

Paying attention to that compass, sometimes you get a glimpse of that future. It had been months after they had traveled from the ends of the world that I have talked about before, which included the Darien Gap; a father and son made it from Venezuela to the US.

Bussed from Texas to Chicago they made it from the landing zone at a Chicago Police Station to Oak Park. Over 2500 miles into the future the son is now on a little league baseball team in Oak Park as they are discovering a new family whose branches stretch out like the limbs of the tree of life with fruit for all and leaves that heal the nations. Undaunted, Bold, Courage. Where does that compass lead you?

Let's keep singing, "Come, speak aloud of Trinity, as wind and tongues of flame set people free at Pentecost to tell the Savior's name. We know the yoke of sin and death, our necks have worn it smooth; go tell the world of weight and woe that we are free to move!"¹

¹ This and the other quote were taken from our hymn of the day, *Come Join The Dance of Trinity* ELW 412.