

That's the wonderful thing about God's Word. It reveals how fervently faithful God is to his promises. "A faithful God who does no wrong," Moses says, "upright and just is he" (Dt 32:4). Paul the Apostle puts it this way: "If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself" (2 Tm 2:13). Whatever God has promised has already happened or will come to be. This Advent season we remember how that happened in the coming of his Son, Jesus Christ. God promised that a virgin would conceive and give birth to a son, and she did. God promised that he would be born in Bethlehem, and he was. God promised that he would live a life of perfection and then die on a cross for the sins of the world, and he did. God promised that his tomb would not hold him and that he would rise in three days, and that's what happened. God is faithful to all his promises—past, present, and future. In all of this Jesus was an eternal lightning rod to catch the brunt of God's wrath and anger over our sins and atone for them all. The Apostle John says, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn 2:2). Over and again God's Word points us to Jesus. When Isaiah said that the Word of our God endures forever, he was pointing us to Jesus. Jesus is meant to be the anchor of all time, the only One through whom all people of all time can find their eternal shelter in the midst of the brevity of life. That's why we sing:

*When darkness veils his lovely face,
I rest on his unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil.
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand (CW 382:2).*

In Jesus Christ God has given us a permanent shelter that can withstand the withering wind of the law. It really is ironic that, as the Holy Spirit breathes death on the outside, he whispers life on the inside. The two go hand in hand. Were it not for the one, we would not seek the other. "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of our God endures forever." The words and promises of our God always stand firm. There is only one permanent shelter "in every high and stormy gale," and that is Jesus Christ. May the withering wind of the law that the Spirit of God breathes on us today lead us to recognize and repent of our sins, so that we might then embrace and appreciate the gentle whisper of the gospel, the good news that in Christ Jesus we are redeemed, restored, and forgiven. What the world needs now is love, and it's the love of God that not only prescribes the solution but actually provides it in Jesus. Amen.

Is 40:1-11 – *What the World Needs Now: Humility* – 28, 702, 11, 14
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Isaiah asked God, "What am I to say?" God didn't answer him, "Go and tell folks that they are all created in my image. Tell them how to meet their full potential. Tell them that they can do whatever they set their minds to. They'll eat that up." No, God said, "Here's what I want you to say: 'All people are like grass, dead, dry, withering grass.'" Why in all the world would God do that?

The people to whom Isaiah was to speak were an arrogant and obstinate people, people who thought that, because they were chosen by God, they could never fall. God had sent the Assyrians to wipe out the ten northern tribes of Israel, and now the two southern tribes of Judah were on the verge of being wiped out, too. So King Hezekiah prayed, and in response the Angel of the Lord put to death 185,000 soldiers in the Assyrian army overnight. You would think that the people would be led to repent at such a close brush with death but, no, they thought they were invincible. They figured that, no matter what they did or how they lived, God would never abandon them.

We live in a similar age of arrogance, especially when it comes to the fields of science and medicine. Some say that with the ability to read DNA we'll soon be able to predict and prevent all disease and sickness. They are arrogantly wrong. This is the arrogance of self-sufficiency, the arrogance of stubbornly trying to live life while ignoring God—neither listening to him in his Word nor calling on him in prayer. It's living as if there were no final judgment.

Isaiah's message to us today is "All people are like grass." That's a humbling message, one that forces us to do some self-evaluation and consider honestly what God tells us in his Word. As we continue our Advent series on *What the World Needs Now*, we thank God that he loves us enough to be honest with us when he tells us:

We Are Like Grass

- 1. This is the withering wind of the law.**
- 2. This leads us to gentle whisper of the gospel.**

1. It can be so devastating when we're faced with the brevity of life. Youngsters come down with a serious disease at an early age, and they die. Classmates and friends die in car crashes and from drug overdoses, and we're shocked. How often haven't we said, "No parent should ever have to bury a child"?

In a sense, that's what happened to Hezekiah just before the events of our text. God had told him that his sickness would end in death. This was Hezekiah's lament: *"I said, 'In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death and be robbed of the rest of my years?' I said, 'I will not again see the LORD himself in the land of the living; no longer will I look on my fellow man, or be with those who now dwell in this world. Like a shepherd's tent my house has been pulled down and taken from me. Like a weaver I have rolled up my life, and he has cut me off from the loom; day and night you made an end of me. I waited patiently till dawn, but like a lion he broke all my bones; day and night you made an end of me. I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am being threatened; Lord, come to my aid!'" (Is 38:1-14)*

King Hezekiah figured he was too young to die. He was in the prime of his life. He was doing good things for God and wanted to do even more. Isn't that the problem with life? We never accomplish all we want to accomplish. We're never able to cross off every item on our bucket list. We don't want to think about death but only about what we're going to do today. God is speaking to us today and saying, "You are like grass, here today and gone tomorrow."

Grass is such a fickle thing. It doesn't take long for grass to wither and die. A couple of summer weeks with no rain, scorching temperatures, and a steady south wind will dry it out quickly. This is what it's like living in a world of sin and death, and it really is quite sad. Think about our most cherished moments in life, things that happened when we were in the prime of life: our confirmation, our wedding day, or a day of athletic or artistic achievement. We felt like we were on top of the world, didn't we? But now all we have are pictures and memories. We need special clothing to keep our body parts hidden. We need special makeup to hide our wrinkles, and we color our hair. We need glasses and hearing aids, dentures and orthotics. Our loveliness is like the grass and the flowers of the field.

Think also about why all this happens. Isaiah says, *"The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them."* The Hebrew word for breath is "ruach," the same word used for the Holy Spirit. Usually we associate the breath of the Holy Spirit with life. When God created Adam in the Garden of Eden, he *"breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and [he] became a living being"* (Gn 2:7). When Jesus gave his disciples the Ministry of the Keys, the power to forgive or retain sins, John says, *"He breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'"* (Jn 20:22).

But the same God who gives life also puts to death. This is what he says: *"There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand"* (Dt 32:39). God wants us to know that he authors both life and death. Death isn't just a random occurrence that happens in a world of sin; it's something under God's power and purpose.

Why is this so important for us to know? It's because our sinful nature wants to ignore the fact of death and cover it up. While it's commendable to practice good health and care for our body, it's easy to reach a point in life where we're in denial over what is happening and even angry about it. Men buy fancy cars and get involved in affairs with younger women because of the so-called "mid-life crisis." Women go into depression when they're unable to keep up their appearance, feeling worthless because of their looks. Some who should be caring for children at home choose to party and act like idiots in their mid-thirties and forties. They refuse to grow up. Some exercise religiously and do all they can to hide their age, because they don't want to face the inevitable fact that they're getting old.

The Holy Spirit is breathing on us today. He's saying, "You are grass, dry, dusty, dead grass." You can fight it. You can get angry with God. You can shake your fist at him, but you won't stop getting old. You're fading, and you're dying. This is the hot and withering wind of the law, which leads us to the whispering wind of the gospel.

2. *"Comfort, comfort my people,"* God tells Isaiah. *"Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins."* God doesn't want his people to look inward and downward but to look upward and outward. The Holy Spirit is speaking to us today, not to drive us to despair, not so that we try to build a shaky and temporary shelter, but to lead us to seek a permanent shelter from the hot and withering wind of the law.

Think of Elijah, who didn't want to be a prophet anymore. He took shelter in a cave, thinking he was the only one of God's people left. God came to him there and revealed himself in a gentle whisper. He spoke softly to him and assured him that he wasn't alone. This is the way of the Spirit. He blows on us with the withering wind of the law, so that we seek permanent shelter in the midst of life's brevity. *"The grass withers and the flowers fall,"* Isaiah says, *"but the Word of our God endures forever."* It took 700 years for Isaiah's prophecy to be fulfilled, but God's Word stood firm, and it came to be.