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## **Repairers of the Breach**

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Among the many things I love about the place we visit in northern MN every summer is a little creek that flows into the bay on Lake Superior. This year, I was intrigued to see a beaver dam about 10 feet downstream from the little footbridge. I know beavers can be terrible pests, but I marvel at their ability to build a perfectly curved dam across a creek without ever once having taken physics or calculus. They're so good at what they do that their dams generally can stand secure, come hell or high water, season after season. Unless a torrential thunderstorm dumps over 3 inches of rain in about two hours, as happened early one morning. And then that beautifully constructed dam will get breached by the sheer power of water tumbling down from the nearby cliffs. And all of that chaotic, rain-swollen, run-off water will go swirling and tumbling into the bay, carving out a swiftly flowing channel downstream, carrying bits of the dam along with it. Which, as it turns out, is exactly what happened.

And by the very next day, the beaver colony had repaired the breach, and built up the walls. The creek below the dam diminished in depth and velocity, the wetland began to fill back up. Chaos retreated. Order was restored.

In our first reading this morning, the prophet Isaiah has some stern words for the people who have returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon. Two generations earlier, the Babylonians had invaded Judah and lay siege to Jerusalem. Ultimately, the walls of the city were breached – a terrifying end to a slow war of attrition. Once the walls were breached, the Babylonian army swept in, destroyed the Temple, and took the people captive. It was a political and a theological calamity. The City of God lay in ruins. What a sight it must have been to the grandchildren and great grandchildren of those exiled people when they finally could enter the land they knew only from their ancestors' stories. They set about rebuilding the wall – repairing the breach, literally. They set about rebuilding the Temple. In short, they set about restoring order from chaos. It was holy work because they were doing what they believed God did and had done from the beginning of the world – bringing order from chaos.

Great! So why the stern words in light of all this good work? Well it seems that in the process of that restoration, the leaders were once again losing sight of their purpose. Laborers were being exploited, scapegoating and evil speech were rampant, the needs of the poor were being ignored, the Sabbath was being treated as any other day. In short, they were conducting themselves much as their ancestors did right up to the time of the Babylonian defeat and subsequent exile – business as usual, and not in a good way.

And Isaiah reminds them of the Covenant. It's easy to go down a rabbit hole of thinking that a covenant is the same as a contract. This is an oversimplification, but essentially a contract spells out what each party is entitled to, where a covenant is a promise of what each party will give the other. A covenant presumes love, trust, and fidelity on both sides. So Isaiah describes the blessings that come when people work in partnership with God rather than going their own way, serving their own interests, pursuing their own affairs. And these blessings exemplify shalom – the peace of God. Which is to say, the full-bodied goodness and wholeness of creation for which the Sabbath is and was meant to be a regular, celebratory foretaste. To breach the boundaries of the Covenant through waywardness was to court not just disaster, but chaos. In a metaphorical sense, the consequence of such human waywardness – sin – is like the turbulent, destructive creek rushing toward oblivion, sweeping everything along in its path.

To choose to live in covenantal relationship, on the other hand, is to repair the breach. And that is what Jesus, especially as we find him in Luke's gospel, came to do. To stand in the breach of

covenantal relationship and repair it. That's what he's doing in our Gospel reading for today with the bent-over woman. Jesus describes her as one who had been bound by Satan – a name which Jesus, a devout Jew, would have understood as meaning, “The Accuser.” The one who points the finger. At that time, any illness or physical deformity was considered defacto evidence of sin. She literally and metaphorically was kept from doing the thing she was created by God to do – stand up and praise God. Until Jesus stood in the breach. And loosed those bonds of oppression. When you think about it, what better day to proclaim God's deepest desire for Shalom than the Sabbath? His action scandalized because it revealed the deep-down truth of who Jesus was and is – God Incarnate. The one who stands in the brokenness and repairs the breach.

Today we welcome Lucas Hultgren into the Body of Christ through Baptism. It will be his joy and his challenge to pattern his life in the manner of Christ. To join his brothers and sisters in Christ and be a repairer of the breach, using the gifts that the Holy Spirit will bestow upon him. Sounds like a tall order, doesn't it, to be imitators of Christ in that way? And yet, our own baptisms call us all to be agents of reconciliation in a world beset by the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil. We are called to be agents of reconciliation in a world that is distorted by the scapegoating, exclusionary powers of human culture. To paraphrase an Anglican priest called John Wesley, we are called to do all the good we can, by all the means we can, in all the ways we can, in all the places we can, at all the times we can, to all the people we can, for as long as ever we can.

And we can take a page here from the beavers. Their job was not to repair Hoover Dam. It was to repair the breach of the dam in their creek. No one of them was responsible for all of it. All of them worked together with the gifts – in their case, instincts – God gave them. And so it is with the Body of Christ called the Church. And when we get this...when we lean into this calling...we ourselves come to realize the far surpassing power of God's unconditional grace and love.

And when that happens, we too can stand up straight and praise God.