

(SMILE)

When I was 3 years old, there was a popular slogan

– “Things go better with Coke”

And when I was 16, the slogan was “Coke adds life”.

Maybe you remember those.

When we consider our Scriptures today, we see that these things can also be said about Jesus

and they are true of him in much deeper ways than Coca Cola can ever be.

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Things go better with Jesus.

Consider Mary. Here was an ordinary girl.

- She had no special qualifications for an exceptional future.
- She could expect a simple life of modest means; no more.

But God chose her to be the mother of his Son, Jesus

– and from that moment, she was no longer ordinary

– no longer unexceptional.

From then on, all generations would call her blessed.

Her purpose was now extraordinary and her future secured.

Things for Mary go better with Jesus.

And Jesus adds life.

Consider the congregation of the prophet Isaiah.

Here was an agricultural people who depended on the produce of the land for a living.

Unlike farming in America that yields in 3-4 seasons,

farming in the Judean desert had two seasons – rainy and dry.

During the dry season, the rivers dry up,

the earth becomes hard and cracked,

and the desert is desolate and unproductive.

During the rainy season, the rivers fill,

the earth soaks up the moisture,

and the dry plants that lay dormant spring to life and blossom.

The prophet declares the coming of the Lord as like the coming of the rains

–making things better for a spiritually dried out people.

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Have you ever felt like a dry desert inside?

Like nothing can grow in your spirit?

- Writers speak of writer's block in that way.
- Pastors and other Religious leaders know periods of spiritual dryness, when the connection to God seems absent or distant.
- Athletes have slumps
- and artists have droughts of creativity.

- For many people, depression and anxiety are a form of spiritual dryness that awaits the coming of new life.
- Chronic pain or illness can become for some as a dry desert crying out for relief.
- And grief can make our lives dry and dormant.

Like the seasons, these periods of spiritual drought just come without being invited.

They are not a sign of moral failure or lack of faith.

We can expect them as surely as winter is coming.

What these times are

is an opportunity for faith to exercise

– an opportunity to trust in God to restore life to the soul.

An opportunity to be patient for the Lord to act.

The important thing to remember is that God has acted and will act again to bring life and to make things better.

These times of dryness do come to an end

– better days are coming, says the Lord.

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Isaiah described the season of God's life, **the salvation of God's people** as being recognized by

- the blind seeing,
- the deaf hearing,
- the crippled dancing,
- and the mute singing.

It is no accident that when John's messengers came to Jesus wondering if he was truly the Messiah,

truly the arrival of the promised day of the Lord God,

he answered:

Go and tell John what you hear and see:

- *The blind see*
- *The crippled walk*
- *Lepers are cleansed*
- *The deaf hear*
- *The dead are raised*
- *and the poor have good news brought to them*

These are the signs of the salvation of God prophesied long ago!

Jesus is their fulfillment.

From the day of his birth, Jesus has been ushering in that great day of the Lord.

But it isn't easy to accept. Jesus even said:

Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.

Although the signs of God's salvation were all there,

people expected a warrior God to swoop in and turn things around – a splendid king in glorious robes

and a crown of precious stones.

Could they accept a carpenter's son born in a manger?

Could they accept a rabbi who challenged the status quo and spoke truth to power?

Could they accept a Messiah who hung on a cross like an ordinary criminal?

Or would they be scandalized by Jesus

– offended at such a notion like we might be offended if Jimmy Kimmel were to show up to the Oscar Awards in a track suit instead of tuxedo.

Or if the preacher showed up for worship in a gorilla suit?

Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me, Jesus says.

**Blessed is anyone who permits the Babe in the manger
and the Man on the cross**

**to be the One who makes things better,
who brings life to the dry, dead world.**

...

The promises of God are kept in Jesus.

And since Pentecost, they are kept in the Church, in whom the Holy Spirit of the risen Jesus lives on earth.

As the Lord comes with forgiveness, grace, and life

to make our lives better, secure in his love,

**So we are the rains poured out on the dry desert of our world
to bring it to life.**

In all the dryness of our lives,

the deserts deep inside us where even we don't like to go,

Jesus comes with the refreshing rain of Communion,

refreshing us and restoring us to life once more.

Then he sends us out with his Holy Spirit in us to bring life to others in their dryness.

This is how Mary responded to the coming of Jesus into her life

– *My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord*

– *my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*

Whatever your dry places are right now,

stretch out your hands to receive from your Savior

the very life that has no end – his own,

given in his body and blood.

Lay before him the gaping cracks of your sins and failures

and receive the grace that fills them with life.

And then go from here overflowing your banks,

blooming with beauty,

teeming with new creativity and life

– to touch the world with the life that only Jesus brings.

For not only has God acted to make all things new in Jesus,

but Jesus is coming to put all things right and to bring his faithful people home to him.

Jesus is our only hope –and he does give life and make things better.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen