

2025 Is. 6

Every year it seems there are a few reports of people getting knocked around by bison up in Yellowstone. And if you are like me, you imagine that all of them are dimwits who got too close to try and take a selfie for Instagram or something. I try to fight against this instinct, however, because it is certainly possible someone was happened upon at the wrong place at the wrong time by an aggressive bison. But that was allegedly NOT the case in April of 2024 where a reportedly intoxicated male approached a bison, kicked it in the leg, and for his trouble, received some medical attention and some fines from the legal system.

And so the park continually reminds us to stay at least 25 yards away from the bison. They deem that a pretty safe distance, I suppose.

We have two accounts in our readings today of someone being well within what they deem a safe distance of something quite dangerous and powerful.

Isaiah and Peter both find themselves in the presence of God, and unlike the park visitor who thought he could go up and kick the thing, these two men want to be anywhere else. “Woe is me!” Isaiah says. “Depart from me, Lord!” Peter says. Depart from him where? How far would a safe enough distance be? 25 yards? Or out of sight, out of mind?

I wonder if that is how we often think of it – “God can’t see me now. Or at least I try not to think about the fact that he can...” And we try to go our own way, or against his way, because we are too dimwitted to realize he sees all things.

Which is not to say there aren’t times that we don’t share a common hubris with the bison-kicker. “God I want some answers!” We might cry out in our anger. “God I deserve this!” We might cry out in our pride. Knocking on the door, poking the Bison. Or, the most common answer when we

knocked on doors in this very neighborhood, “I know I’m going to heaven, the presence of God, because I’m a pretty good person.”

A pretty good person can walk into the presence of God? You can’t walk within 25 yards of a bison! And you think you deserve to stand before the King of kings?

And we might respond: “But God isn’t a bison, some animal, he’s the nice guy in the clouds with a grey beard right?” “Nice” – “Nice.” Does that mean kind? Does it mean compassionate? Does it mean merciful? Does it mean Good? If so, then yes, God is all of that. Or does it mean harmless? Then that isn’t God. We steal a line from CS Lewis’ Narnia series, “He is not a tame lion.”

He is strong. His bodyguards alone shake the temple when they speak – imagine how strong his Word is? (And that strong word – is that good news or bad for us?) Isaiah doesn’t even dare describe God! Just the train of his robe filling the temple - it’s so magnificent. This “nice guy” is the Maker of the stars and black holes, and the sun that you can’t even look at without pain. And you want to look at him? So the angels cover their faces.

And so Isaiah is afraid, he wants to be somewhere else. He says I am a man of unclean lips and of a people of unclean lips. You notice that, he isn’t just ashamed of his sin, but of his people’s sins. We Americans don’t like that do we - corporate guilt? “I didn’t kick the bison, why should I get knocked around? I didn’t kick the bison, don’t call me a dimwit!”

Oh but you are of a people of bison kicking dimwits, and if we are honest have we done things that are just as dumb? And yes, we are good at justifying ourselves, but before God who sees all, how confident will you be in your works?

If we are honest, as we confessed, we stand before the Lord accused and woefully unworthy. We stand before the Lord and it is dangerous ground to stand on. And so we could run, but where can you hide from the omnipresent One? You can close your eyes and plug your ears or look at the screens or the money or the toys, but none of them save you - and he made those things anyway.

And so if we can't escape this untamed and omnipotent God, maybe we should just confess that we are totally at his mercy. Luther, after he died, had a piece of paper in his pocket, it read simply: We are beggars, this is true.

Our best works, our best excuses, our whole being – they are filthy rags before the Holy God of all – and so we come before him with nothing, nothing but a chance (or a promise?) of his mercy.

The Good News is: he is merciful.

He purges Isaiah of his guilty lips. He does not scream at Peter, he bids him rise, and not fear.

In fact, as you see, he doesn't just not destroy them - he Calls them, He sends them.

Does he send them down “nice” roads? Free from conflict, free from distress, free from failure and their own sin? If by “nice” you mean easy or relaxing or conflict free, then no. No he didn't send them down those roads.

But he did send them down roads that were meaningful, important, roads they did not walk alone for, as we already noted, you can't run from God, neither can you be sent down a road where he won't be present. “Lo I am with you always to the end of the age,” he promised his Church.

I don't know what road your traveling, I don't know how nice it is, or if you're stumbling or wandering. Or maybe you feel like you are skipping along just fine. Either way, here we have a chance to meditate on God's promised presence where two or more are gathered in his name.

And where we receive his gifts. And I think our readings invite us to consider how unworthy we are to be in his presence – this doesn't mean get up and run out – it does mean as we have already confessed, that we should maybe realize that before him, we don't have much to offer.

But this then might be our confidence – he hasn't stuck us down. He could have done that so easily to Isaiah and Peter, he could do this so easy to his whole creation he broke. He could have come as a monster for vengeance, he could have come with his legions of angels, including those seraphim, to crush us.

But yet the King leaves the Glorious Throne room, and swaps his seraphim for shepherds, a throne for a manger. Who will go for us? God Calls out, who can go and fulfill the law, who can go and carry the sins of the world, who can go and overcome the grave? He goes.

And his road brings him to a cross and it is not a “nice” death there. It is ugly, gross, scandalous, bloody, and forsaken. That we, undeserving, that we, beggars, that we a people of such foolishness and brokenness, might be washed clean, given a share in his kingdom, and a promise of the inheritance of life.

Yes, we are wholly at the mercy of the untamed God, but, take heart, look to a cross and see how much mercy he has. So much, overflowing, free, and for you according to his Word and promise.

How will you stand before the omnipotent King? With the blood of Christ pleading on your behalf. How can we approach God in the fear of the Lord, yet with Confidence? By his invitation and promise that a curtain has been torn, that his name is upon you, that his body and blood are for you.

When you come before the King, the untamed one, it may feel a little unsafe. But his promise and work in Jesus is sure and certain. He is faithful, He will give his mercy free and overflowing unto life. And on that day, we will rejoice with the faithful in peace. God be praised. Amen.