

Isaiah 42 1–7, “Dear Bruised Reeds”
1/10/20 First Sunday after Epiphany
Pastor Alex Amiot

Isaiah 42:1–7 (NKJV)

¹ “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold,
My Elect One *in whom* My soul delights!
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.
² He will not cry out, nor raise *His voice*,
Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.
³ A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench;
He will bring forth justice for truth.
⁴ He will not fail nor be discouraged,
Till He has established justice in the earth;
And the coastlands shall wait for His law.”
⁵ Thus says God the Lord,
Who created the heavens and stretched them out,
Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it,
Who gives breath to the people on it,
And spirit to those who walk on it:
⁶ “I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness,
And will hold Your hand;
I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people,
As a light to the Gentiles,
⁷ To open blind eyes,
To bring out prisoners from the prison,
Those who sit in darkness from the prison house.

When a reed is bruised, it’s no longer strong enough to stand on its own. A reed is just a tall leaf or stalk of grass that you would normally find by a river or ditch around here.

There is a prophecy about Jesus in Isaiah 42:3 that says, “A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench.” This promise of God was not talking about how Jesus would deal with actual reeds and flax candle wicks. It’s not saying that he would be a gentle basket weaver with reeds and extra careful when He used candles. You are the reed. You are the wick. When you are weak like a bruised reed, Jesus won’t break you. When you’ve lost your energy and fire and all you are is a smoldering wick, Jesus won’t snuff you out.

You who are weak and humble before the Lord, take comfort in Jesus who says “Come unto me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

This verse was exactly the comfort that I needed when I was at a low point last week. The cares of life and the sorrows of suffering loved ones weighed on me. Plus, I was just tired. On Tuesday I drove to and from Maple Grove. I thoroughly enjoyed the visit with my mom on the way there, but driving is tiring, and knowing that I was bringing her closer to the next phase of difficult cancer treatment was surreal.

Less than twelve hours after getting back Tuesday night, my family made a day trip to Minot and back on Wednesday. The roads were good, but driving is tiring, and knowing that I would be officiating my wife’s grandpa’s funeral when we got there weighed on me.

The next morning I drove to Viking and stood at the bedside of the daughter of two members of Our Saviour’s. Kristie’s battle with cancer was over and she had departed to be with Christ. Her parents and her daughter were grieving and so was I. We read Scripture and we prayed. Our grief was accompanied by the sure hope of eternal life in Jesus Christ our savior.

When I got home I felt tired and small. It had been day after day after day of being confronted with the frailty of life. I felt uncomfortably aware of my inability to overcome the brokenness of the world. I actually imagined myself standing in God’s huge hand as a tiny person, wondering what the Almighty God might do to me or what He might allow to happen. I felt vulnerable.

That’s where my mind was on Thursday. And to my heart in that moment the Lord brought Isaiah 42:3. I was the bruised reed, and Jesus wasn’t going to break me. I was the smoldering flax wick, and Jesus wasn’t going to snuff me out.

I imagined myself again as a tiny helpless person in God’s huge almighty hand, but this time I wasn’t afraid of being crushed. The Lord says in Isaiah 41:10, “Fear not, for I *am* with you; be not dismayed, for I *am* your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

My fellow bruised reeds, you aren’t in God’s hand to be crushed. You are there to be held and comforted and protected and strengthened. This is comfort from God’s Word for you when you’re humbled before the Lord. Last week it was the brokenness of the world and my inability to fix it that humbled me before God.

God is also faithful to work through His righteous and holy Law to convict our hearts of sin and humble us before Him. Either way, we are humbled before God and He delights to forgive us and hold us and give us His Holy Spirit to strengthen our feeble knees.

But a word of warning: don’t pretend like you have no reason to be humble before the almighty God. You may not feel weighed down like I did, and yet you must become as humble as a bruised reed. You might not feel burnt out like a smoking flax, but you must humble yourself before the Lord and confess that you have no fire in you in God’s sight apart from the light of Christ.

The Pharisees rejected Christ because He came to free the souls that were in bondage to sin, death, and the devil. The Pharisees said they weren't in bondage at all and had never been slaves of anyone. Christ said He came to give sight to the blind, and the Pharisees mocked Him, asking if they who could obviously see were supposed to think of themselves as blind. In truth, they were enslaved and blind. They rejected Christ in their pride.

No matter your mental state, your level of grit, or your fortitude and strength, before the Lord God you must become as humble as a bruised reed. Do not attempt to stand before God in your own strength.

God can cause you to stand before Him, and He does it by His grace as a free gift on account of His Son Jesus Christ. God's grace is sufficient for you. His power is made perfect in your weakness. Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up.

When Christ came He appeared weak to the powers that be. He didn't come with a shout to rally troops to His side. Isaiah 42:2 prophesied, "He will not cry out, nor raise *His voice*, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street."

Instead, He came humbly to the waters of baptism and experienced what was prophesied in Isaiah 42:1-2. In His baptism, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove descends, and the Heavenly Father said in Mark 1:11, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Isaiah had foretold these words of God the Father to God the Son when he wrote in Isaiah 42, "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One *in whom* My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles."

Jesus didn't gather an army around Him to face the threats of the world. He was content to be filled with the Holy Spirit in baptism and go about His mission to bring about justice. How did He bring about justice? Jesus did complete His mission of bringing forth justice to the Gentiles, as Isaiah prophesied, but how?

The sinful world was a reed that had bruised itself with the lusts of the flesh, the rejection of the Lord, and with the pride of life. God would have been just to snap the flimsy reed into two and toss it in the fire. But God is not only just—He is also merciful. By the mercy of God He sent His Son to be the humble bruised reed that would be broken to pay for the sins of the whole world.

Jesus was broken so that you would be mended. Jesus' life was snuffed out on the cross so that yours would not be quenched. How does this play out in real life? Even if you are persecuted, the Lord will not abandon you. Even if you are struck down, the Lord will not allow you to be destroyed. Even if you die, Jesus said anyone who believes in Him and dies yet lives. To live is Christ, and to die is gain. To depart and be with Christ is far better, but for you to stay alive and remain in the flesh is more necessary on account of your loved ones and on account of whatever work the Lord has left to do through you here.

Dear bruised reeds, Christ was bruised too. You who humble yourself before God, Christ was humbled too. You who believe and are baptized, Christ was baptized too. In baptism Christ received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and you do too. Whether you feel strong or weak, pray for a

heart that is content with the gift of the Holy Spirit. He will teach you to trust the promises in God's Word when you are weighed down. He will comfort you with the forgiveness of your sins through Jesus Christ your Lord. He will guide you to resist temptation and sin and seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Isaiah wrote this about Jesus, "A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. ⁴ He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth; ² He will not cry out, nor raise *His voice*, Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. ³ A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. ⁴ He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth."

From the point He was baptized and began His earthly ministry until the point He brought about substitutionary justice on the cross three years later, He did not fail or quit from discouragement. He endured the cross because He loves you. When He holds you in His hand it isn't to harm you, but to comfort and strengthen you so that you're no longer afraid. He knows he's dealing with a world of bruised reeds, including you, so He is compassionate toward you.

As you come unto Him, you who are weary and heavy laden, seeking forgiveness and comfort and relief, may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.