

“HE WAS NO ANGEL”

December 28, 2025 Isaiah 63:7-9

What do Alanis Morissette, Bob Dylan, Che Guevara, Alec Guinness, Courtney Love, Stevie Nicks, George S. Patton, Henry David Thoreau, Queen Victoria, Andy Warhol and -- wait for it -- John Wesley ... have in common? This is a motley collection of names. The commonality is that they **all kept or keep diaries**. Keeping a diary isn't just something teenage girls do. Many people have been journaling for years, some have during a difficult period of their life when they desired clarity, and others just like to write. Of course, with the ability to blog and type our thoughts, random as they may be, how we do a diary may have changed. Still there is something satisfying about picking up a special pen and putting our reflections in a designated journaling book.

Even if journaling in a diary is not your thing, there are some benefits to it. For instance, a journal can help you:

- clarify your goals,**
- plan for the next day,**
- sort through ideas,**
- make you a better communicator,**
- have an outlet for your burdens and outrages,**
- keep a record of your blessings and joys,**
- affirm the reality of your life,**
- turn ideas into words, and,**
- serve as a way to communicate with God.**

In some cases, journaling may even help others learn from or about your life. Or, as in the case of the diary of Anne Frank, it can give later readers an inside glimpse of what life under certain difficult conditions was like. If nothing else, a diary is a record you can look back over from time to time to see how your thinking and life has changed. It also enables you to re-evaluate, in light of more mature understandings, youthful outlooks recorded previously.

At the end of next month we will have our **Annual Congregational Meeting**, and who doesn't love annual congregational meetings. At that meeting we will present our year end reports. In a way, those reports are a public diary of what our church did during the past year. It shows what was important to us, and more importantly, what God did through this congregation.

That is what the prophet Isaiah is doing in chapter 63. He is journaling in the form of a lament psalm. In this morning's section he is celebrating God's past work among the people of Israel. At the same time this passage is set against what the people of Israel failed to do, which resulted in judgment, disaster, exile, and now return. Isaiah journals these words in an attempt to restore the **exiles' spiritual identity by looking into the past record**. Remember what God has done and who you are so that you can move forward in faith.

On this last Sunday of the year, it's a good time to remember what God has done among us, to remember who we are, so that we can move forward into the new year in faith.

I. WHAT HAS GOD DONE?

One of the great physical exercises that is simple to do and beneficial is the **Farmers Carry**. The farmers carry involves simply taking a weight in each hand and walking. This is a good exercise because it mimics everyday life. We carry groceries, laundry baskets, and other household items all the time. The farmers carry strengthens your grip and legs, helps with your balance, and encourages good posture. It's difficult to walk with weights when you're bent over.

Isaiah writes, “**...in his love and pity it was he who redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.**” The prophet tells the people what God has done for them. God redeemed, God lifted up, and God carried them.

If you have ever been hiking or walking with a young child, they tend to get tired. So, what do you do? **You pick them up.** If your child wakes up in the middle of the night screaming because they had a nightmare. What do you do? You lift them into your arms and comfort them. If your child falls down and gets hurt, you lift them up and break out the band-aids.

The beautiful imagery Isaiah gives of God is that of a parent picking up their tired, hurting or frightened child. God is the good shepherd who lifts us up and carries us until we can walk again.

Think over this past year about the times you were lifted up and carried. Perhaps this lift came through a friend who comforted you when your spirits were low. Maybe that lift came from words of encouragement,

an answered prayer, a listening ear, a piece of advice, or just the sense that God was near, and you could trust him with whatever was going on. How marvelous to know we have a God who tells us, **“Don’t worry, I’ve got you.”**

But an even more powerful action of God is **redemption**. In the bible the word “redeemed” is a financial term. It means to purchase back. This could apply to a material object such as buying back the family farm. It could apply to paying the ransom of a family member whom an enemy army has captured. But in this passage, it refers to two of God’s actions. The first is redeeming the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt and secondly bringing the Israelite exiles back home. This redemption includes the restoration of their relationship with God.

This is why Isaiah writes, **“Surely they are my people...and God became their savior in all their distress.”** This is why we celebrate Christmas. In Christ Jesus, we have a savior who has redeemed and claimed us as his children. God has lifted, carried, and redeemed us. This is what God has done.

II. WHY HAS GOD DONE THIS?

Patrick Beeman wrote an article about the nature of evil while reflecting on the TV show **Breaking Bad**. The story concerns the newly diagnosed cancer patient and high-school chemistry teacher, Walter White, whose financial problems and anxieties about his mortality lead him to turn his knowledge of ... science toward the production of an ultra-

pure and world-class methamphetamine. In other words, he becomes a meth cook.

Originally, Walter's motives are honorable enough: to provide for his family after his death. But Walter's actions in pursuit of this goal quickly show the insidious nature of moral consequentialism. The didactic value of *Breaking Bad* lies in the way it follows the "**ends justify the means**" morality to its inevitable conclusion, namely that little sins and small compromises eventually lead to the annihilation of conscience and the destruction of a person's character. By the end of the series Walter has become thoroughly evil.

While we would never equate God with a drug dealer, at some point we must have questioned God's **motives**. Why would God even bother to act on our behalf? Why would you send your **Son** to earth only to suffer and die? Are people really worth redeeming, especially when so many reject God, harm others, and don't seem to be any benefit to the rest of humanity?

Isaiah tells us that God has shown **favor, mercy, pity and steadfast love** to his people Israel. Why, especially when they fail to obey God most of the time? Beside this, these people have not shown favor, mercy, pity, and steadfast love themselves! What possible motive does God have to act on their behalf, or ours for that matter?

The simple answer is because God is good and God's goodness is not dependent upon ours, thank goodness! However, Isaiah gives us the deeper reason for God's motive of good will by saying, "**according to the**

abundance of his steadfast love.” This steadfast love is translated from the little word **hesed**. There is no one word in English that adequately conveys the greatness of this word. It means fidelity, unwavering faithfulness, deep abiding love. The closest example we might have of this quality is the love a parent has for a child. Hesed and Holiness are the two words that describe God’s character. They are the driving force of God’s being. God acts with favor, mercy, pity, and steadfast love because that is who God is.

This hesed is what drove God to do for Israel what they could not do for themselves. Hesed makes life possible. It is God’s costly, passionate parental love that sent Jesus into the world that the world would not perish, but be saved. The good news is God can not be bribed, manipulated, or deviate from his powerful steadfast love toward us. God’s mercy is not constructed on magical terms but on relational ones. Everything begins with God’s goodness.

III. WORTHY OF PRAISE

Because of whom God is and what God has done, the Lord is worthy of **our praise**. Isaiah begins this scripture with, “**I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord, the praiseworthy acts of the Lord, because of all that the Lord has done for us and the great favor to the house of Israel.**”

The prophet Ezekiel agrees with Isaiah when he says, “**Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? (in other words these are**

not the offerings I am after, instead) Offer to God a sacrifice of THANKSGIVING, and pay your vows to the Most High."

The proper response to all of God's acts and goodness is simply praise, worship, adoration, and thanksgiving. By recognizing and acknowledging the loving activity of God in our world and lives that we act like the children of God and reflect his love to the world.

Over 80 years ago a young girl wrote these words in her diary. "**It's an odd idea for someone like me to keep a diary; not only because I have never done so before, but because it seems to me that neither I -- nor for that matter anyone else -- will be interested in the unbosomings of a thirteen-year-old school girl.**" That young girl was Anne Frank and contrary to her expectations her diary has been read by over 30 million and translated in 70 different languages. It just goes to show that you never know the impact of a diary.

But we can certainly know the impact of God upon our lives. Even if you don't keep a diary – you might want to take some time on these long winter nights to recall what God has done for you over the past year or even your lifetime. Where have you been lifted, redeemed, carried, favored, shown mercy, and loved? As you recount these gracious deeds, take time to give thanks to God not only for what God has done but for who God is. What a great way to end the year and enter into a new one.

Amen.

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley
Sunday, December 28, 2025
Second Scripture Lesson

Isaiah 63:7-9

7 I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord, the praiseworthy acts of the Lord,
because of all that the Lord has done for us and the great favor to the house of Israel that he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

8 For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not act deceitfully,"
and he became their savior

9 in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them; in his love and pity it was he who redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be To God.