

I have never had cancer. Some of you have. Our beloved parishioners Martha and Dan had cancer nine times between them. THEY were our champion cancer survivors. They each eventually died, as we all will one day. But neither Martha nor Dan died of cancer.

I have never had cancer, I don't think so, anyway. But I once was told I "probably had cancer." Test after test: "maybe cancer." One long August, before getting a clean bill of health, I learned the need to rejoice in the face of whatever life brings.

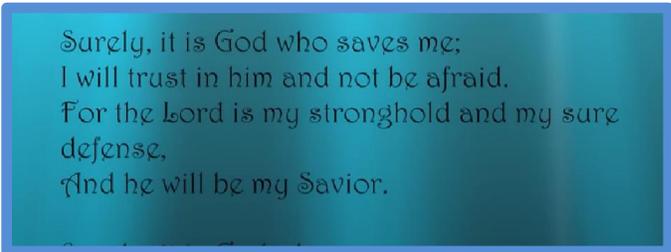
What I learned is that our state of happiness comes from outside us. Things happen to us that causes us to feel good about our lives, about ourselves (or not). We are happy to the extent that everything is going our way. Joy, on the other hand, comes from within. We are as joyful as we choose to be, as joyful as we trust all will be well.

Easier said than done. But this is what the 8th century prophet Isaiah teaches us today. In lieu of a Psalm, the lectionary has included *Canticle 9: The First Song of Isaiah*, which is Isaiah 12:2-6.

Now, since I have brought Martha and Dan to your attention, I will tell you that, if Martha were physically with us today, she would already have burst into song at the mere mention of Canticle 9.

There are ten versions of this passage set to music

in our blue and green *Hymnal 1982* and *Wonder, Love and Praise*. But you who remember Martha know which one she would have sung. [!]



Surely, it is God who saves me;
I will trust in him and not be afraid.
For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure
defense,
And he will be my Savior.

And those of you who attended Bible study with Dan all those years know what HE would have done: He would have taken out a Bible, chided us for not noticing that the lectionary omits verse 1, and looked up the passage to discover WHY. He then would have objected to the omission of the judgment portion of the text. Verse 1 reads, "You will say on THAT day, I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, and you comforted me."

Verse 4 begins the same way, with, "You will say on THAT day." The repetition means this passage WAS intended to be sung. On THAT day, we are to give thanks to God.

And what day is THAT DAY, when we are to give thanks to God? Why, every day, of course, the day on which God "saves" us. THAT day is THIS day, EVERY day.

There's a reason Isaiah was interested in being saved. He lived in the 8th century Before Christ, when the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been obliterated by Assyria and the Southern Kingdom feared it, too, would be lost forever. The question of Isaiah's time was who to ally itself with for its survival:

Assyria or Egypt, two mighty kingdoms threatening to dance over Israel's grave. Or should they rely solely on God?

Isaiah understood that the predicament his people faced was due to their unfaithfulness to God. And, in the midst of Isaiah's pronouncement of divine judgment, we get today's little gem: "Surely, it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid."

No matter what enemy is knocking at the door, no matter what dire situation threatens, today's lesson teaches us that we are to have hope and joy, we are to thank God, because God will save us. The irony is that, once we realize we can trust God, God has **ALREADY** saved us.

Cancer? God has already saved me. Whether I live, I am the Lord's; whether I die, I die in the Lord. Halleluiah, God has saved me. Just like God has saved you; trust in the Lord!

The First Song of Isaiah tells us where to anchor our joy. We can live in joy because we **KNOW**, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that God saves us. Not "will save us," although he will save us from death when our life in this world ends. Not "has saved us," although he has so acted. But, here in the now, God saves us, each and ever moment of each and every day.



We have nothing to fear because, no matter what, we can trust God. We can afford to trust God because the God who made all things, the very God who made us and nurtures us—**THAT** God—shelters and protects us through all the adversities and gifts of this life.

To channel the prophet Zephaniah, "Sing aloud, O Church of the Resurrection; shout, O people of God! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O beloved of God! The Lord has taken away the judgments against us, he has turned away our enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in our midst; we shall fear obliteration no more." Why? In the words of Jeremiah, "God has given us a future and a hope." And in the words of both the Psalmist and the Apostle Paul, "Rejoice always; again, I say rejoice."