

Life Sunday Sermon 2019

Isaiah 46:3-4 “From Age to Age the Same”

Rev. Dennis Di Mauro, Trinity Lutheran Church (NALC), Warrenton, Virginia

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I'd like to invite you to visit a small chapel with me. Our destination is Fort Wadsworth, New York, on Staten Island. It's at an army post. Fort Wadsworth's post chapel is named for Medal of Honor recipient Father Vincent Capodanno, who was a navy chaplain attached to a marine infantry unit in Vietnam. Known as the “Grunt Padre,” Fr. Capodanno accompanied his regiment on its combat operations, often risking his life for his men. During one such mission, Capodanno ran 75 yards through heavy fire to reach a fallen marine and carry him to safety. During these battles, he would often run to the wounded, saying quick prayers and offering words of consolation. Although he said mass at least once a day for the troops, it was not just the words he spoke in his sermons, but it was even more so his very presence that drew men to him—and to Christ.

On the morning of September 4, 1967, he volunteered to go out with marine units fighting in the Que Son Valley. Immediately upon arriving, his unit was attacked by a force of nearly 2,000 North Vietnamese. Capodanno jumped into action, bringing in wounded men and giving last rites to the dying. Even though he was hit twice—once in the face and once in the right hand—he continued to look for the wounded, telling them, “Have faith. Jesus is the truth and the life.” He reassured an injured young man that “God is with us all this day,” and he blessed him with his still-intact left hand. Attending to another wounded marine, Capadanno shielded the man with his body. But sadly, this was his last earthly effort. He died after being shot about 50 times under withering machine-gun fire.

The narthex of the chapel at Fort Wadsworth hosts a little makeshift museum about Capodanno's life. One of the island's major thoroughfares bears his name, as does a naval ship. An effort is underway in the Catholic church to have him canonized as a saint.

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Father Capodanno embodied his love for God in his service for others. He reflected that love in his willingness to carry fallen comrades to safety even in the most dangerous circumstances—the kind of selfless love that would ultimately cost him his life.

Now in our reading today from Isaiah chapter 46, we find the story of another war in which others were being carried: namely Bel (the high god) and Nebo (the god of learning and writing), deities of the Babylonians. They were being carried off into exile because the Babylonians had been defeated in battle and were now headed to Persia in humiliation. Everything had to go, everything the Babylonians owned: their furniture, possessions, and even the idols they worshipped.

In this panicked scene, the prophet Isaiah makes a poignant comparison between these Babylonian idols and the true God of Israel. He says, “Look at the idols of Bel and Nebo—they are carried by beasts of burden, even though they themselves cannot carry anyone!”

But Isaiah explains that the God of Israel is different. He isn't carried by animals or people; rather, it is *He* who carries *us*! You see, this is what the true God does! He carries the remnant of the House of Israel, all those who have faith in Jesus Christ, and He carries them throughout their entire lives! God creates us in our mother's womb, He sustains us as we grow, and even in our old age He holds us in His loving arms. Furthermore, He has given us the most precious gift of all: salvation through Jesus's sacrifice on the cross.

But in contrast, the idols are nothing; they are fashioned together from gold and silver by human hands. The Babylonians carry these idols on their shoulders, and they put them into their places in their temples. But they are ultimately lifeless—they can't answer our prayers or save us

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from trouble. They can't even move! And then those who created them bow down to them. It's madness!

Now we may think that this can never happen today, but if we do, we need to think again! How many times have we made things that we have fashioned with our own hands into idols—things like money, our cars, homes, television, or the internet? There is always the temptation to rely on these present-day idols—things that promise pleasure, comfort, peace, or security. Furthermore, how many times have we forgotten that it is God who is in charge of our lives from conception to natural death? We have then chosen abortion, euthanasia, or physician-assisted suicide so that we can worship these modern-day idols.

Our own life plans can also become idols. Instead of letting God lead our lives, we create arbitrary timelines. We say, “I won't get married until I am 30, and I won't have my first child until I am 35.” And so, to obtain those goals, we fall into premarital sex or even abortion to make sure our timelines are met. And when we delay childbirth until after the age of normal fertility, we then sometimes resort to medicine or technologies that endanger embryonic lives. Get the point? When we refuse to let God be God, on His timeline, we invariably fall into sin. We simply can't always have it our own way. But as Christians, we need to be open to *God's* way. We need to let *Him* carry *us*, not the other way around.

The true God is like none other! He created the world, He rules it, and ultimately His purposes will be fulfilled! But God also loves us fervently, and He carries us in our burdens. The pagans of old and unbelievers today carry their own idols, but we have a God who is more than willing to comfort and care for us.

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Isaiah gives us three examples of this kind of “carrying love”: a father carrying his son, a shepherd carrying his sheep, and an eagle carrying its young. I’ll add two more: Fr. Capodanno carrying those fallen marines to safety and Jesus carrying our burdens while sacrificing His own life. Because what do all these examples have in common? Love! God’s love nurtures us from the moment we are conceived until the moment that He decides to take us home again.

And here’s the good news. Two thousand years ago, Jesus died for us on a lonely cross on Calvary hill to carry *Us*—to forgive every sin, carry every burden, and wipe away every tear. So today, through the power of the Gospel, we too, just like Fr. Capodanno, can begin to carry each other’s burdens.

Through faith in Jesus, we have been given LIFE, and we will continue to be given LIFE! He will replace our self-centeredness with HIS righteousness, taking us to an eternal Zion where we can live eternally and enjoy Him forever!

Amen.