

Life Sunday Sermon 2019

Isaiah 46:3-4 "From Age to Age the Same"

Rev. Michael W. Salemink, Executive Director of Lutherans For Life

[www.lutheransforlife.org](http://www.lutheransforlife.org)

Google "reasons my kid is crying." Look it up online sometime—funny pictures of tearful tots with profound captions. Toddlers bawling because "Someone ate all the muffins (it was him)." "She didn't fit through the doggy door (note the open house door right next to her)." "I won't let him eat Styrofoam." "She's not allowed to kiss the toilet." "She dropped a receipt we got from the gas station." "There was a hotdog hidden in his cornbread." "Mommy let me brush my teeth five times but drew the line at six." "Put himself in time out (for no reason)." "Doesn't want to go (even though we've repeatedly told her we're not going anywhere)." "Slide was too slow." "Couldn't get the last Cheerio on the spoon." "I wouldn't let him push his fingers into my throat until I make that noise he really likes when I can't breathe." The world needs more pictures of kids crying. Crying babies tell the truth.

Whose pictures are they, though? Whose baby picture looks like this? Belly-up on the ground by himself (or herself), kicking about like a beetle on its back ... nothing but a diaper on, full drawers but empty tummy, nose running and drool-covered. Whose baby picture is this? Chubby cheeks and skinny little legs, floppy and fragile, hollering herself (or himself) red-faced ... difficult, discontent, disruptive. Whose baby picture is it? Demanding, depriving, depending ... in need and unable. Whose baby picture is this?

Isaiah says it's Israel's. Isaiah pictures Israel as a baby: "Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb" (Isaiah 46:3). Already in chapter one as well, "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me" (Isaiah 1:2). Reasons why Israelites are crying? They fattened themselves until they grew too large to harvest the food that got them large. They pampered themselves until they became too lazy to hew the furniture that left them lazy.

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Reasons why Israelites are tantrumming? They trampled upon their laws and morals until they left those laws powerless to protect them. They swallowed the poisons they took in their mouths to spit out at each other. The leaders who got them rich by cheating then cheated them out of even their rightful share. The officials they bribed to favor them betrayed them because of a bigger bribe. Reasons why Israelites are sulking? They took such advantage of one another that they left none to defend them against strangers. The treasures they raided from their neighbors attracted raiders from other neighborhoods. The bullies to whom they handed over lunch money went ahead and helped themselves to dinner and breakfast.

Reasons why Israel's gone hysterical? They cast golden idols too stiff to stand up for them. They carved wooden gods too heavy to help. They averted their ears from the divine commands so often they could no longer hear the heavenly promises. And the Lord who has might enough to deliver them also has might enough to destroy them. They're just juveniles, toddlers, and babes. This is Israel's baby picture.

Do you recognize this picture? Whose baby picture is this? Silly Israel. At least we don't bow down before graven images. OK, maybe we worship professions. Maybe we serve prosperity. Maybe we revolve around property, submit ourselves to popularity, and surrender to pleasure. But at least we haven't forgotten the words and ways of Almighty God. OK, maybe we dismiss the doctrines our national atmosphere finds offensive but at least we aren't losing the lines of right and wrong. OK, maybe we concern ourselves instead with what is convenient, comfortable, practical, and profitable, but at least we didn't abandon widowed or fatherless neighbors. OK, maybe we keep them at a cushioned distance because of the controversies and costs they come with, but at least we don't exploit the impoverished or outsiders among us. OK,

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maybe we use their emergencies to excuse our excesses, but at least we don't cheat and steal.

OK, maybe we save for our later use the extra that could save the life of another because it's easier to designate policies and agencies that deal with them.

Thankfully, we don't act like Israel. Good thing we don't behave like those sinners. No, we've become even more dreadful and dire. Our people fear public opposition more than God's disapproval. Our leaders revere profits more than the prophets. Our culture blesses death as some kind of salvation from suffering. Our country gratifies the sinful flesh's appetites like a sacrament. Our experts idolize autonomy and control even when self-expression means self-destruction. Our celebrities exalt sexual license to a religion. Our communities abort our brothers in the name of progress. Our world euthanizes our sisters for the sake of uniformity. Our consciences often permit it. Our minds justify and rationalize it. Our mouths lie silent, and our hands stand idly by. Our hearts sometimes even promote it.

Whose baby picture is this? It's ours, every one of us. It's our kind, impaired at all ages. It's our race, compromised whatever our appearances. It's our species, incapacitated by sinful nature. Our entire kind is unresponsive to the core. Our whole race is weakened from conception until last breath. Our species in totality is deadened by temptation and failure. As if in vitro, we're all immature against ailment and adversity. As though in utero, we're all difficult and discontent because of pain and loss. Like terminal patients, we're all disruptive and dependent in the face of guilt and grief. Senseless and defenseless, this baby picture shows us, from age to age the same.

Whose baby picture is this? It's also God's. God has been a baby too. God became a baby. He has just such a heart, just such a nature, just such a way. Isaiah introduces embryo Jesus

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gestated in Mary’s womb—“the virgin shall conceive.” Infant Jesus wore diapers and lay in a manger. Chubby-cheeked Lord Jesus toddled. Skinny-legged Lord Jesus had a childhood. Savior Jesus was gentle and relentless in adolescence. Isaiah reminds us of Savior Jesus, delicate and determined in adulthood—“like a lamb that is led to the slaughter.” Christ Jesus—humble in the garden, vulnerable under the law. Christ Jesus—broken on the cross and incapacitated by crucifixion. God chose to become weakened, deadened, defenseless, and dependent like us. Behold, one of us.

The Almighty made Himself tiny so that He might draw near each of us. The Most High made Himself mild so that He might dwell with all of us. He shares in our ailments and our pains. He suffers with us in our discontent and hysterics. He saves us from our own deficits and failures. This Father will have you despite your sulking and tantrumming. This Savior assumes your difficulties and accepts your differences. This Lord takes on your immaturities and takes away your sins. During your disrupting and demanding, He still welcomes you and wants you. Through your emergencies or your excesses, He respects you and protects you. He embraces even those of us who participate in abortions. Jesus cherishes us even when we permit murderous experiments and promote assisted suicides. God forgives that, God forgives you, and this proclaims the littlest among us special. He loves you, and this proves the least of these precious. This grace pronounces babes and aged, impaired and unable, humankind beginning to end, priceless.

Whose baby pictures are these? They’re all God’s. They’re all God’s babies. We’re all His little ones. You “have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; [now] even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will

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bear; I will carry and will save.” By resurrection He has removed all our not-enough-ness, as high as heavens are above earth. With everlasting presence Jesus releases from any limits, as far as east is from west. Because He lives and reigns, every human being has this identity, this purpose, belonging to and beloved by Him who has neither rival nor equal, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever, from age to age the same. Take it. Trust it. You are innocent to Jesus. Know it. Own it. You are righteous in Christ. Receive it. Believe it. You are holy before God. Life is never a sentence. Life is always a story.

If us, then any. And every. Israel’s crying kids and babes await. These are their pictures too. They look like us. They look like Jesus. He calls them each by name. He calls us by His name. He is their survival and salvation as much as He is your hope and healing. These are somebody’s babies. Someone important and powerful loves these babies. Even when no one else calls them baby, He whispers it, sings, repeats, and shouts it. In frightened bellies and frozen labs, whether aching or aging, afraid or ashamed, alone or unaware, He wraps Himself around especially the ones who feel their frailty more than most. Public opinion and political controversy cannot change these facts. Scientific findings and technological innovations do not amend these truths. Social experiences and economic circumstances will not modify this God. As to patriarchs and prophets, as to apostles and martyrs, as to reformers, forefathers, and foremothers, as to saints and angels, so to postmoderns and nobodies like ours—from age to age His grace prevails the same.

You can speak this truth. You get to show this love. You share this Gospel, and Jesus Himself shines through your courage and compassion. We have the privilege to give it voice. We have the delight of putting it in practice. In individual conversations and civic advocacy, at

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congregations and across communities, you'll locate the babies in these pictures. By acts of service and sharing—opening your hands, your hearts, and your homes—you'll take hold of heaven's treasures. With words of warning or winning over, encouragements and assurances, you'll cradle the Lord's own little ones. While noticing, visiting, and listening, you'll collect them into His own album and household.

Wonder what to say? Worried about how to think? Wanna know when to get involved? Let Lutherans For Life show and tell. For forty years, two generations, LFL has found the words and done the work, connecting life issues to Scripture and doctrine. Why not use their free resources and ample materials? Come join their network! Fund their activities and make this ministry's rewards yours. Enlist in the purpose. Participate in the hope. Experience the joy. Watch the tears wipe away. Walk together into new creation. This paradise life is neverending—  
from age to age the same. Amen.