



### ***When Cracks Begin to Show***

*Isaiah 40:27–31*

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In the past 3 to 4 weeks, we have heard news stories out of Iceland about magna just under the surface of the Reykjanes peninsula rumbling, causing thousands of earthquakes, and threatening to become a full-blown volcano. After lying dormant for 800 years, the volcanic system under the peninsula erupted three times since 2021. Those happened in remote valleys. Now the threat is more real.

The fishing town of Grindavik with a population of about 3,400 has been evacuated because there is now a jagged crack running through the town, “thrusting the ground upward in places by 1 metre or more.”

We might have heard more about Iceland if it wasn’t for another event in our world that has taken most of the news oxygen since October 7—the ongoing massacre and possible genocide happening in Gaza. It started with Hamas militants and IDF soldiers who seem to shoot first and ask questions later killing 1,400 people in Israel. In addition, Hamas took 240 hostages. Except, it didn’t really start there. Israel was already holding 8,000 Palestinians hostage in its military prisons, a group made up mostly of civilians—adults, teens, and children being held without charge. Actually it started 75 years ago with a fateful UN decision, but that story will have to wait for another time.

That Oct 7 event was very quickly followed by the IDF shelling and bombing Gaza’s cities without discrimination for military and civilian targets. This was followed by a ground invasion, that is now on a 4-day pause. Imagine being in Gaza and knowing that in 4 days—by now a mere 48 hours—the massacre will resume. The rest of the world seems okay with this. In



Regina the government is more concerned about a briefly interrupted question period than about the ongoing massacre in which Canada is complicit, having given its full support to Israel. As of Saturday (Nov. 25) 14,800 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli attacks. This includes close to 6,000 children with another 1500 to 2000 children missing, probably buried underneath the rubble.

If the Ancient Writings and 21<sup>st</sup> century quantum physics are to be believed, there could well be a connection between these two events. The Ancient Story about the apple in the garden makes a direct connection, telling us that how people act and behave impacts all of creation including the planet we live on. The 1st century missionary preacher and theologian, Paul von Tarsus, seems to connect both creation's suffering and decay and its ultimate redemption to humankind's choices and lifestyle and redemption from that same decay. Twenty-first century quantum physics suggests that if energy from one place in the Universe is projected toward another place in the Universe, that second place will be changed by that energy. I doubt there is any argument that there is an almost infinite amount of negative energy all around our planet. Physicists could easily see the correlation between the two stories I pointed to and hundreds of others.

Even if there isn't a quantum physics connection between massacre in Gaza and the earth cracking in Iceland, there certainly is a metaphorical one. Our news papers and TV news broadcasts are full of stories that, in my mind, convincingly demonstrate that cracks are showing in our world, some new, some the widening and deepening of those that were already here. War in Ukraine. The opioid crisis. Homelessness. Gun violence. Anti-immigrant, anti-the other thinking and feeling, American politics, support for Trump and his Republicans in the US. Increasing poverty—this year 7 million people in Canada used the food banks. Our own health



and aging. I am increasingly aware the not only the milk in my fridge has an expiry date but so do I and I am a lot closer to it now than I once was. In that kind of world, how are we to live without giving up on hope and without giving in to despair.

That is a question that has been hanging around for a long time in my life. However, recently it's been more haunting and in my face than ever before. Gargoyles are yelling it in my ears. Blood like the magna in Iceland carries it to my heart. The electric impulses in my brain seem ever more often to lose their way as negative energy pushes and pulls on them.

Some of you know that I write email blogs. I write them and send them out by email. Apparently, some people actually read them. Recently it seemed to me that I should address this question in the blogs: "How might we find hope, resist despair and go on living, not just surviving but really living?" A number of times I sat down at my computer, pulled up the template, and then sat and looked at the screen, wondering what I might write. I have made a halting start. That same question came with me as I considered what I might preach today. I could grab a lectionary text, dig into it, and see what it might have to say to us. Or, I could start with the question and then go looking for what I might find. I chose the latter.

I invite you to come with me on that search, through Ancient Scripture and my own searches and experiences in the past, to see what we might find that could offer hope to all of us. Although I would say most of my preaching is rooted in my personal journey, today that will be even more true of where we will wander.

*1. "Chew on Scripture"* Though there are several poems in the Ancient Writings that say the same thing, I grabbed for the introductory poem to the greatest Ancient Collection ever compiled, the poem we call Psalm 1. It says:

[Blessed & filled with God-life] are those [whose] . . .



delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on [God's] law they meditate day and night.  
They are like trees  
planted by streams of water,  
which yield their fruit in its season,  
and their leaves do not wither.<sup>1</sup>

For our English ways of thinking, there is an unfortunate translation here, translating the Hebrew word, “Torah,” as “law.” We read that and wonder what life-giving blessing could there be in meditating on the Criminal Code of Canada or even, Yahweh’s Criminal Code. Torah in Hebrew is not a bunch of laws, rules. In its most narrow definition, it is the first 5 books of our Bible, Genesis to Deuteronomy. Sure, those books lots of laws as part of the Ancient Story but the writings in these books—the Torah--form the entire foundational story for first Israelite and then Jewish faith and spirituality. A more generous translation could be that Torah includes all of Scripture, all the Writings that speak of God and faith and the world and us to us. Hence, Eugene Peterson’s translation of Ps 1 tells us that the blessed folk are those who “thrill to God’s Word and chew on Scripture day and night.”<sup>2</sup>

When I was on my chemo journey, a journey darker than I could ever have imagined, one of the things that became absolutely crucial to me and the thing, I believe, that made the difference between surviving and coming out the other end with a new vigor for life on one hand and simply giving up in despair on the other was the daily time spent journaling when I meditated on Ancient Writings and the writings of contemporary fellow wanderers in life’s wilderness. Even as chemo threatened to destroy me physically and emotionally, those mornings spent in meditation were among some of the best times, certainly most life-changing times, I

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<sup>1</sup> Ps 1:13. NRSV.

<sup>2</sup> *The Message*.



have ever had. And so I offer “Chew on Scripture” as one way of finding hope and courage when cracks begin to show.

**2. *Know God*** The Ancient Protest Preacher, Jeremiah, wrote:

[This is what God says]:  
Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom;  
do not let the mighty boast in their might;  
do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth;  
but let those who boast boast in this,  
that they understand and know me,  
that I am the LORD;  
I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth,  
for in these things I delight,  
says the LORD.<sup>3</sup>

When our English Bibles use the word “know” when speaking about God and/or people, they mean relationship. When used to describe human relationships, it means the most intimate of relationships between two partners. Therefore, it is here that Pastor John, who left us a Good News Story Collection, helps us to figure out how to live when cracks begin to show. In his copy of Jesus’ prayer prayed at the Last Supper, Jesus says: “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”<sup>4</sup> Two important things to note:

- When Jesus in this Collection uses the phrase, “eternal life,” he does *not* mean heaven. Eternal life is a life experience here on this planet in space and time. It is a quality of life. In another setting Jesus calls it “abundant life.”
- This text does not say we need to know certain things *about* God to experience this quality of life. In fact, as far as I know, there is only one reference, certainly in the New Testament, as to what knowledge about God is required. The Anonymous Author of the book we call Hebrews says: “Anyone who wants to

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<sup>3</sup> Jer 9:23–24. NRSV

<sup>4</sup> John 17:3. NIV,



approach God must believe both that [God] exists *and* that [God] cares enough to respond to those who seek [for God].”<sup>5</sup>

Two things happened to me with regards to my relationship with God while on my chemo journey. I had for years been convinced that God loved me. It was during my times in mediation that one morning I was able to write in my journal, “I love you, God.” It was a love I felt for God in the same place I feel love for Sylvia and our family.

Secondly, since that chemo journey I say with full conviction: “Although I believe less *about* God, I now believe more *in* God.” “I believe less about God but I believe more in God.” Before 2015 and that fateful journey, I would sometimes be drawn toward atheism. Since then, never. My relationship with God is so real.

Among other things, I think there are three things important for developing this relationship.

1. As the Hebrews theologian and philosopher said, we must believe that God, in fact, desperately wants to be in relationship with us. What we need to do is believe that and open ourselves up to that reality.
2. The “chewing on Scripture” that I began with. It was while chewing and journaling that God and my relationship with God became ever more real to me.
3. Well, this is my third point about how to have hope and experience life when cracks begin to show.

**3. *Be in Community.*** In the summer of 2018, I was emotionally and spiritually battered and bruised. To understand this, you have to understand something about Mennonite churches. There is much good about the Mennonite church. However, their congregational style of being

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<sup>5</sup> Heb 11:6. *The Message.*



church and especially their congregational style of church government, seems to give almost free reign to bullies in the congregation. Although that bullying can be directed toward anyone in the church, it can be especially strong toward pastors. And when directed at pastors, it seems no one has the courage or will power to step in. They prefer to look the other way.

Sylvia and I had experienced this previously and in 2018 we experienced it again as we were pushed out of a congregation. We were battered and bruised. In some ways we dealt with this together; in other ways, we each took our own path. After a while I began looking around to see if there was a community of faith where I might be able to find a caring home, caring people. On that search I arrived at First United Church and it was amazing. This congregation became that healing congregation for me.

Sometime after I started attending here, a good friend of mine who feels more at home in the evangelical tradition, asked me: “Why do you attend First United?” I paused for a moment and then I said: “Because I experience God there.” He replied: “I thought you would say that.”

If we want to live with hope and resist despair when cracks begin to show, we need a caring and worshiping community. I can hear some of you asked: “So where have you been this past year Friesen?” You make a good point. In a recent email blog, I wrote that it was time for me to get my butt back into the pew. Jean Pearson has assured me she will hold me accountable. You may regret what you took on, Jean.

**4. Have a mission** something you can do. I’ve sometimes thought that if only I could be prime minister or even premier for one year, boy, how things would change. Well, we know that is not likely to happen nor do I see any of you moving to Regina or Ottawa anytime soon. And, being that many of us are in the balding and/or white hair crowd, I suspect not many of us have the energy of a Joe Biden. So, what might we do? I think an Ancient Folk Singer sketched that



for us in a brief stanza of one of his songs: “Love justice, /be compassionate and loyal in your love, /and walk humbly with your God.”<sup>6</sup>

We could spend a lot of time talking about what that means. Whole books could be and have been written about how to live that out. In my own life and something I regularly offered the people when we were at Emmaus, I have boiled this down or fleshed it out or paraphrased this or re-written it into this: “That in every situation and with each person I meet, I will be a blessing and healing reminder of God’s love.” That’s it. Doesn’t require a degree from U of R nor a certificate from Sask Polytech. Don’t need an office downtown or a position on any committee or in any government. Doesn’t matter if you don’t have a job or can’t walk very far or hardly at all. You just have to be committed to the idea and live it out in each situation you encounter and with every person you meet (including your spouse, BTW, when they happen to annoy you): Be a blessing and healing reminder of God’s love.”

***Conclusion:***

There it is: my four suggestions for living with hope when cracks begin to show.

- Chew on Scripture
- Be in relationship with God
- Be part of a healing and worshiping Community
- Have a mission: Be a blessing and healing reminder of God’s love

That’s it. So be it. Amen

Or at least that’s what I think today.

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<sup>6</sup> Micah 6:8. A combination of NRSV and *The Message*.