



A Word from Emily

Every year, we watch the seasons change. I love that New England with its 4 distinct seasons provides such a concrete visual of that change. Fall and winter are not everyone's favorite seasons and I understand why. Besides the cold, the trees lose their beautiful leaves, the flowers disappear, the animals hide away and the sun doesn't hang out as long. It feels dark and desolate. And sometimes hopeless.

Until spring comes. Then the flowers bloom and the trees sprout new leaves. The animals come back out to play and the sun decides to stay. And the best part is; it happens every year. We can count on spring bringing new growth and new hope after every winter. I happen to like winter, being from 'pretty up there' in Maine. But I still need that visual example of new hope and new growth that the transition of seasons brings because I often struggle with anxieties, hopelessness, and fear.

I like that Isaiah is our Advent theme this year. I love Isaiah anyway! I like how his visions are, well, so visual and not so difficult to understand. And I am not so good with poetry, which makes me also appreciate his poetic style. But what I love most

about Isaiah, are his stories of hope. The hope of God, our God, coming to save us. Too often, I struggle with anxiety and the feeling of hopelessness and am not always confident in my relationship with God, so although Isaiah has so many messages to give, his visions and reassurances of hope are so important to me.

I read a little deeper to find that the term "wilderness" meant so many terrible things to Israel. It was the place they fled from slavery, felt lonely and afraid, was dry with no water or food, and was full of dangerous animals. To have someone say 'But Wait! Even "the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom. It will rejoice greatly and shout for joy..." because of the "... splendor of our God" (Isa 35:2), would seem crazy! Although, it is also enticing. The idea that even the thing most people feared the most, will find new growth and new hope in God's glory. Our long and frozen winters are not as dangerous and scary as the wilderness probably to those people, but the idea of renewed hope resides in both. Isaiah reminds Israel and he reminds us (at least he reminds me), that God will come. He will come to save, to heal, to make the impossible possible. And when he does, those who have faith won't need to worry. "Be strong, do not fear" (35:4). The despair and death of winter will not last forever. Spring will come and with it, new hope.