

“The most beautiful story” Micah 5:2-5a

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore, he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ!

Can we begin with a quick survey? To see how we feel, what our life is like, how we perceive this world, how we are going? Just a few questions. Have you during the last two years, or perhaps a bit more, have you felt any of the following?

Have you felt that the world is getting stranger and stranger a place? Have you felt that there is less and less logic in what is happening in the world we live in? Have you felt that it is harder and harder to know what is true and what is not?

Have you felt that there are diametrically opposite answers and views on almost every issue we are facing and dealing with? Have you felt that it is getting harder and harder to know whom to trust, that every institution, every person seems to be letting us down, changing their stances, neglecting their promises, etc.?

Have you felt like there is ever growing uncertainty, confusion and chaos spreading all around us? I don't know about you, but I could answer affirmatively to all of these. And how does all of this make you feel?

More anxious? More fearful? More suspicious? More helpless and hopeless? More vulnerable? If so then that is completely understandable given our situation, there is nothing wrong with you if you feel that way and no shame admitting that it is so.

Now, next – if this is how you have felt, what have you longed for, what have you desired, what have you wished for? I would make a few guesses, or rather a few suggestions what people in such circumstances may be longing for.

We may want to make sense of what is happening. And making sense may be a part of even deeper need of being in control. Not that we can control our environment, or society, or the world.

But if we can at least somehow make sense of what is happening, then we feel that we are at least somewhat in control, at least by means of having a grasp on our situation. But that is not all.

If we find ourselves in situations where we may feel lost and vulnerable there are a few more longings; we need to feel some certainty, some belonging, some support, to feel that we matter, that there is some significance to our existence. Does this seem familiar? Can you relate to this? At least partly?

Such situations clearly reveal our creaturely limits, our interconnectedness with the rest of society, our dependence, but also our ignorance and lack of comprehension; such situations may not bring the best out of us.

What often happens next is that we throw ourselves into this race trying to address those needs, trying to make sense, to regain control, to find some certainty, to find where we belong. And how do we usually do this?

Quite often we choose to do this either by gluing ourselves to mainstream media or diving into the depths of alternative sources, and there is a super-abundance of those. So, what is your “weapon of choice”?

Do you turn on radio or TV as soon as you are awake to hear the latest news? Not to miss anything? Or do you turn on your computer to check your special sources, websites, podcasts, or do you check your mobile for latest insights?

What do we find? One and the same events and facts are presented to us as part of different, often competing and incompatible stories. We are exposed to these competing stories all the time. They literary prey on us from all sides.

I am not sure, which of the many stories are more dubious, those which you can hear in mainstream media, or those which you find on alternative media, where independent content creators offer their views on what is happening in the world.

Whichever stories we embrace, we hope that they will help us to make sense of the world, and therefore will grant us at least seeming control over what is going on, they will tell us who, or what evil forces or groups of people are to be blamed for all that is wrong today, where to stream our anger.

But then embracing certain stories also satisfy those other longings, we feel that we belong somewhere, that is, to the group of people who believe and embrace similar stories, we feel like a part of that community. We understand one another.

Then we are not like those... who believe differently. For they have really lost the plot! You know, those people who think differently. “How can they? That doesn’t make any sense! None at all!” Sadly, but this is how it goes...

This is interesting, once we embrace certain stories, certain explanations, we often look at those who believe otherwise as some conspiracy theorists, or conspiracy victims. And this is true for all, regardless of which stories we have embraced, mainstream ones or some alternatives.

The point I want to bring to you attention is not about which of the many human-made stories that we believe and embrace are only partly true and which ones are completely false. The point is different, it is about – what do these stories do to us?

We may hope they will help, but they fail us. They don't deliver. Their explanations are biased and imperfect, even if not totally false. They bring neither much clarity nor certainty. So, they actually don't help much.

They can't take away our anxiety and fear and give us peace. Embracing them don't make us special and worthy. They may stir up our anger against those who believe differently – those conspiracy theorists, or those naïve crowds... In a way they drag us into the vicious circle – we long to make sense, to be in control, to belong, but end up being more anxious, confused and divided. We see it around.

Why do I mention all of this today? Because our today's reading from Micah actually gives us a pearl of timeless wisdom for situation like ours. The prophet speaks about someone, who's coming will change everything. Everything!

About someone, who can satisfy all our longings. About someone, who is truly in control. About someone whom we can trust, to whom we can gladly entrust our very lives. About someone, who indeed makes us special. About someone who invites us to belong to an exceptional community. Let's talk about Him!

So, someone who is truly in control. O, yes! Think about this, how often people keep their promises? We try, and in smaller things we may do quite well. But what about big things? What about promises by the mighty of this world, by political leaders? How often do they fail? Not that they were not genuine in their promises.

But things just happen which are totally outside of their control. Outside of their control! But here we have someone, who have been making promises since the beginning, since ancient days and fulfilling them all. Without failing.

The Bible is literary a record of promises made and fulfilled. There are often hundreds and thousands of years between the time when a promise was made and when it was fulfilled.

They had to be written down, for they went far, far beyond our lifespan. While in the garden of Eden, the Son of God promised to restore what we had broken – our relationship with the Triune God, our access to the tree of life, and the goodness of God's creations. That promise was made to be fulfilled thousands of years later.

Today we heard how the Holy Spirit spoke through a simple man in the 8th century BC, and revealed where the birth of that mysterious person will take place – in Bethlehem. We have no time to look at all these many testimonies, but one thing is clear – this God, whom we are privileged to call our Father, He is in control.

But He is also someone whom we can trust. Not just to trust, but entrust ourselves. Micah uses two images, that of an almighty ruler and that of a shepherd. This is important. Because this is how the true God has revealed Himself from the beginning. We see it already in Genesis 1 and 2.

God the Almighty speaks the vast Universe into existence and assigns to heavenly bodies their tasks. Nothing is impossible for Him. He speaks and it happens. But then in Genesis 2, where He creates us, that's a very different picture.

Not of supreme power anymore, not of far and distant Creator, but of someone who passionately gets His hands dirty forming and shaping us from the dust of the ground, who holds us close to His chest and breathes the breath of life in our nostrils. Gentle, considerate, loving and affectionate.

Similar picture we can see throughout the Bible. Mighty Warrior, Supreme Ruler, and at the same time – gentle and caring Shepherd. The one before whom the mountains shake and earth runs; the One who won't break a bruised reed.

Do you see, why we can trust Him, why we can gladly put our lives in His hands? Because our God is both, all-powerful and completely in control, He will deliver, no one can stop Him or ruin His plans, but also – He cares for you!

And He makes you very special. Yes, if only we could fully understand how special we are in the eyes of our Father and our Lord and brother Jesus. Just think about this – who else could say these things about you?

“I chose you before the foundation of the world. I myself shaped and formed you in your mother's womb. I knew you before you were born, all the days of your life. I laid down my life for you. I have redeemed you and now you are my own. I have promised that I will never ever abandon you, not now, not in the age to come.

I will bring you to be with me forever, I will make you more beautiful, more perfect, more excellent than you can even dream about, I will make you to be like me.” Who else could say to you these words? Who else has done this for you?

Who else is fully capable of delivering on such promises? In control and caring for you. There is only One. Your God. Your Father. Your Brother. Your Lord. Jesus Christ. He makes you special. He does... You are so special to Him.

Finally, **He gives you a community to belong to.** No, He doesn't just give it to you. He brings you in, He embraces you, He unites you with this community. You know what community it is? Divine community, created by the Holy Spirit.

It is the Triune God opening up His divine community and welcoming you in. The Holy Spirit indwells in you, the Father and the Son make home with you, and you are united with Him and with all God's saints in the most intimate way.

The Spirit who indwells you is God's guaranty to you that He will fulfill all the other promises as well. You are a member not just of a community, you are a member of the body of Christ. This is where you belong.

This is where you will always belong. And know this, the best, the most grace filled, the most heart-warming, the most joyful and uplifting moments and attitudes that we are able to experience today are just shadows of what it to come.

Today our attitudes and relationships are still tainted by our sin, we may wish well, but often fail and hurt others, even in God's family. You know that. But even if that happens, be of good cheer, for you have been chosen.

You have been called. Not by just someone, but by the Triune God, who is in control, to whom we can rely, who cherishes you as His priceless treasure, and who calls you His sons and daughters.

The Day is coming when He will purify us, He will cleanse us and He will make you into that beautiful, excellent, amazing creature that He intended you to be. So, yes, when the world seems confusing and strange and even hopeless place, when the darkness descends, when chaos issues, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and your hearts on this story, which our God tells us.

It is the most beautiful story, and the most beautiful thing about it is this – it is true. It will deliver what you long for, or should we say – He, your Lord will deliver. But you don't need me to tell you this, for the Holy Spirit Himself assures you as He indwells in you and as He fills you with His peace.

Amen.