

A 66-year old Catholic archbishop was kidnapped in Iraq earlier this week. No one could understand why. He was a great humanitarian who had spoken out in favor of religious tolerance. While walking down the street on Monday, he was seized by abductors, thrown into the trunk of a car and taken away. Pope John Paul II issued a personal plea for his release. The very next day the archbishop was set free without any kind of ransom. He said in an interview with Vatican radio this week that he thought his abductors didn't know who he was, and they kidnapped the wrong guy. War is always weird, but this episode provided a moment of hope that wrongdoers can repent, and that even when situations look bad, they can get better.

In today's first reading, Isaiah speaks to a group of people whose life has gone from bad to better. They have lived through war and exile, but now they were coming home with new leadership and a new future. Isaiah says, "Anguish has taken wing, dispelled is darkness: for there is no gloom where but now there was distress. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone." Isaiah believed that God had personally intervened in the lives of these people. At the end of today's passage, he reminds the people how God had intervened "on the day of Midian." He's referring to a battle that had taken place hundreds of years in the past, when Gideon and his army blew trumpets, smashed jars and created so much noisy chaos that the army of Midian gave up and lost the battle. The story appears in the Book of Judges, and the writer says that God saved the day. Isaiah tells the people of Israel returning from exile that the same God who worked wonders at Midian was now working wonders for them.

Everybody gets into situations that are so bad we look for some glimmer of hope that life will get better. Some students get so far behind on their homework they don't know if they'll ever catch up. Some adults get into a financial hole so deep they can't see the way out. Others feel trapped by long hours of work, making it hard to give time to family and relaxation. Some people imagined their status being a little further ahead than it actually is. Others start dreaming about a different life with different loves and different commitments. Almost everybody goes through a time of darkness, gloom and distress.

But Christ has come as our light. Christ has fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah in ways people never dreamed possible. He cures the sick; he raises from the dead; and he maps out a way of life that brings peace to troubled souls. He invites us to repent and to follow him, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

The darkness that invades our thoughts, actions and hopes can make us feel as helpless as a victim in the trunk of a car, but there is always hope, for Christ is our light.