



SERMON RECAP

SEPTEMBER 13, 2026

The Prophet of Kindness:
Quasimodo from
"The Hunchback of Notre Dame"
Isaiah 58:6-12, 61:1-4

In this, the finale of our series on the prophet Isaiah, we turn once again to Victor Hugo. The Hunchback of Notre Dame was the work that propelled Hugo into fame. Published in 1831, it was a hugely popular novel that many credit with saving the famed cathedral. In the early part of the 19th century, Notre Dame had fallen into disrepair. The French Revolution of the late 18th century was not kind to religious symbolism or signs of opulent wealth. Renamed "The Temple of Reason" in 1793, it was stripped of ownership from the Catholic Church. While Napoleon Bonaparte restored it to a cathedral a decade later, the ownership was never returned to the Church. It is still owned by the French government. After Hugo's book, interest in the cathedral inspired a major restoration.

We talked about Hugo a couple of weeks ago during *Les Misérables*, and these two incredible works share many of the same themes, including the harshness of religious institutions that do not include compassion. This week we connected Hugo's story to the final chapters of Isaiah — what scholars call Third Isaiah. These chapters were written after the exile, when the people of Israel had returned home to a city in ruins.

The temple was destroyed, the walls broken down, and the community scattered. Third Isaiah speaks into that moment with a promise: God is still rebuilding. God is still gathering. God is still creating a future where justice and compassion shape the life of the people. These chapters are filled with hope for the poor, healing for the broken, and restoration for the land. They are words meant for people who are standing in rubble and wondering whether anything beautiful can rise again.

It is no accident that Jesus began his ministry with these very words. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus stands in the synagogue, opens the scroll of Isaiah, and reads: good news for the poor, recovery of sight for the blind, release for the captives, and freedom for the oppressed. Jesus chose Third Isaiah as his mission statement. He was announcing that the rebuilding promised after the exile was now happening in him. The Kingdom of God was not an abstract idea; it was the concrete work of healing,



The Hunchback of Notre Dame was written by Victor Hugo in 1831. Disney adapted it into an animated film in 1996 with music by Alan Menken and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz. The film was then reworked into a stage musical, debuting in Berlin in 1999. Though it earned strong reviews and a long run, it did not receive major awards.

liberating, and restoring people who had been pushed aside. Jesus was building on Isaiah's foundation, continuing the work that had begun centuries earlier.

This brings us back to Notre Dame. The cathedral itself took nearly 180 years to build. Generations worked on it knowing they would never see it finished. Some carved stones that would not be placed until long after their deaths. Some built arches that would support towers they would never witness. Yet they believed the work mattered. They believed that beauty, worship, and community were worth investing in even if the results were beyond their lifetime. Hugo's novel reminded France of that long, faithful labor and helped spark a new season of restoration.

Quasimodo, the bell-ringer, becomes a symbol of this slow, faithful work. He is not powerful, not respected, not even welcomed by society. Yet he embodies kindness in a world that often chooses cruelty. His compassion toward Esmeralda, his courage in protecting her, and his quiet devotion to the cathedral all point to a truth Isaiah knew well: God often uses the overlooked to reveal the deepest forms of grace. Quasimodo is a prophet of kindness, not because he speaks grand words, but because he lives a love that resists fear and hatred.

As we close this series, we are reminded that we too are builders. We are building a church community rooted in justice, compassion, mercy, and welcome. Like the people returning from exile, we are rebuilding on promises that began long before us. Like the cathedral builders, we may not see the full result of our labor. But the work is still worth doing. Every act of kindness, every moment of service, every step toward justice becomes part of the structure God is raising among us.

Isaiah calls us to trust that God is not finished. Jesus calls us to join the work. And Quasimodo shows us that kindness is one of the strongest stones in the foundation. May we continue building with hope, courage, and compassion, knowing that God is shaping something beautiful in our midst.

NEXT WEEK:

New Series: The Vision and Mission of Two Rivers UMC