

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, August 8, 2010

A Ministry of Christ the Redeemer Church, San Marcos, Texas

“Trust in Allah but, tie up your camel.”

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This week's Lectionary readings:

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20

Psalm 50:1-8, 23-24

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Luke 12:32-40

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20

The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

***Hear the word of the LORD,
you rulers of Sodom!***

***Listen to the teaching of our God,
you people of Gomorrah!***

***What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?
says the LORD;***

***I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of fed beasts;***

***I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
or of lambs, or of goats.***

***When you come to appear before me,
who asked this from your hand?***

Trample my courts no more;

***bringing offerings is futile;
incense is an abomination to me.***

***New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation--
I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.***

***Your new moons and your appointed festivals
my soul hates;***

***they have become a burden to me,
I am weary of bearing them.***

***When you stretch out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;***

your hands are full of blood.
Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of YOUR doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.
Come now, let us ARGUE it out,
says the LORD:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be like snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.
If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land;
but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be devoured by the sword;
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Let me reiterate the point that this tale is written in THIRD PERSON so it DESCRIBES what happened “reportedly” from a THIRD PERSON’S vantage point ergo “hearsay” evidence. Since this is a “vision”, (***which he SAW concerning Judah and Jerusalem***), the third person could not have seen what Isaiah “saw” but, merely reported what was told to him/her by Isaiah. It is a fine point but one that should be appreciated by discriminating students. Always, when studying scripture, the SCENE, the SETTING and the CHARACTERS must be put into context to fully appreciate the content. The more we know about the “back story”, the more we can glean from the writings. The name, Isaiah means “the Lord saves” which is a name worthy of a prophet of salvation. Traditionally, Isaiah was executed by being sawn in half during the reign of King Manasseh. Having a wife and at least two sons prepared him for this execution method? Unfortunately, a “vision” of prophecy cannot be “validated” until the passage of time reveals the truth or invalidity of the prophecy. As part of my study of “Restoring Honor to our Government”, I have pondered the subject from a different viewpoint. I have read this passage many times but that word, “ARGUE”, never entered my conscious thought. Had you “noticed” it previously? Have we ever “argued” with God? If so, have we ever WON the argument? The theme of Isaiah might be “restoring HONOR to the People of Israel”? My study has revealed to me that the best way to restore honor to our government is to start by restoring HONOR to OURSELVES through honesty and restoration of a “rightness” of heart with the Creator. Then, we must elect “honorable people” to

government and hold them accountable for remaining honorable while remaining honorable OURSELVES. Term limits might shorten the opportunity for people to become “dishonorable”? WE should not expect anything from our elected governmental officials than we should not expect of ourselves. This is an old problem that we find in the Book of Isaiah. Isaiah spent his lifetime trying to restore honor to the people and to the relationship of the people to God and their would-be oppressors. The major themes of the Book of Isaiah are: judgment and salvation, both of which are necessary for RESTORATION. Keep these themes in mind as we study further portions of the Book of Isaiah in coming weeks. These opening verses are a preview of the rest of the book which expounds and delineates the “nitty-gritty” of what it means to face judgment and, ultimately, the opportunity of RESTORATION and of salvation.

Psalm 50:1-8, 23-24 Page 654, BCP

Deus deorum

1

***The LORD, the God of gods, has spoken; *
he has called the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.***

2

***Out of Zion, perfect in its beauty, *
God reveals himself in glory.***

3

***Our God will come and will not keep silence; *
before him there is a consuming flame,
and round about him a raging storm.***

4

***He calls the heavens and the earth from above *
to witness the judgment of his people.***

5

***"Gather before me my loyal followers, *
those who have made a covenant with me
and sealed it with sacrifice."***

6

***Let the heavens declare the rightness of his cause; *
for God himself is judge.***

7

***Hear, O my people, and I will speak:
"O Israel, I will bear witness against you; *
for I am God, your God.***

8

***I do not accuse you because of your sacrifices; *
your offerings are always before me.***

23

3

***Consider this well, you who forget God, *
lest I rend you and there be none to deliver you.***

24

***Whoever offers me the sacrifice of thanksgiving HONORS me; *
but to those who keep in my way will I show the salvation of God."***

The psalmist clarifies the situation for us: sacrifice of "things" is honorable but, greater still is OBEDIENCE because obedience leads to salvation. "My people honor me with their lips but, their HEARTS are far from me." This is reflexive of "don't TELL me you believe in God, SHOW ME." This is but another "thread" that blends into the tapestry of truth contained in revealed scripture. The "weavers" among the readers will understand that the strength of the "cloth" is in the pattern of threads that interlock to compose the fabric. So it is with the "fabric" of scripture. The trick is to see the "threads" among the "cloth" so that the design is appreciated. I hope that is not too "artsy" for some.

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old-- and Sarah herself was barren-- because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore."

All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

Is there any doubt as to why Hebrews Chapter 11 is called "the FAITH chapter"? Paul defines FAITH as "***the assurance***" (*substance*) of things HOPED for,

“the conviction” (evidence) of things not seen.” Faith is TRANSFORMATIVE in that it miraculously allows the things we “hope for” to become real and the things we cannot “see” to become reality. Faith is what allows the “impossible” to become “possible”. The examples cited are of people who, because of their FAITH, were able to transcend and to transform the impossible into the possible. Like Paul opined: “I can DO all things through CHRIST who strengthens me.” Faith is the key in the lock of understanding that opens doors of possibility to the believer. I cannot explain it. Even Paul had trouble explaining it to the “Hebrews”. Faith is like explaining “grits” in “My Cousin Vinnie”, they just ARE. Don’t try to explain it. Just try it and enjoy it. The JOY of faith is that, once we try it, like “Doritos”, “I’ll bet you can’t eat just one” and we keep on keeping on “testing” our faith for the “assurance” and the “conviction” it promises. “Try it, you’ll like it.”

Luke 12:32-40

Jesus said to his disciples, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

"Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

"But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

This tiny passage of scripture has always made me have more questions than answers. What is this scripture about? What message was Jesus trying to impart? To get the full picture of this passage, one must “back up” and read the first 31 verses of Chapter 12. The first twelve verses are about “worry” and the futility of thinking ourselves to be in “control” of anything other than our ATTITUDES. The first twelve verses are about the things that “worry” us and the rest of the passages (32-40) are about putting things into perspective. It is the Boy Scout motto “Be Prepared” substantiated in scripture. Since we don’t “know” the future or what the “future holds”, we have to take care of today’s “business” and trust in God’s future provision for what we “need”. Is that how we live? It is really scary to “trust God” for what we “need”, isn’t it? The world says “Failing to plan is planning to fail.” How does that compare to the gospel advice? I don’t think it means for us to sit under a tree and “wait for God” to feed us and cloth us. It means for us to NOT PUT OUR HOPES into worldly things

TOTALLY. IF we put our reliance on THINGS, we are foolish because the “natural consequences” are that they can be stolen or destroyed BY HUMANS. IF we put our reliance on things ETERNAL, we will not be disappointed because they are in the keeping of the Creator. (The Buddhists have a concept that explains this situation: KARMA, “what will be, will be” because of a “divine plan”.) It is a matter of ATTITUDE, isn’t it? I must sound to the reader like a broken record when I keep harping on ATTITUDE. (Trust me when I say that EVERY world religion has some aspect of this in their particular “theology” because it is a universal truth.) When all is boiled down and the residue accumulated, scripture is primarily about MY ATTITUDE toward the Creator and my fellow humans. Do I put my “trust” in “things” or in God? The Arabic culture has a saying, “Trust in Allah but, tie up your camel.” This is great advice. Do what we can and then, trust God to be our source of salvation and healing. When “all we can do” is “all we can do”, our FAITH becomes alive and useful in making up the “difference”. What has my faith done “for me”? If faith is untested and “unproductive” for daily existence, what’s the point? Having “faith” is both a gift and a choice: ATTITUDE, once again. We, in our lack of faith, want to depend on our own “wiles” and “wits”. I don’t know about you but, my wiles and wits are running out. What I’m doing isn’t working worth spit. What can I do to change the situation? How about putting the “whole duty of man” into practice: “Honor God by KEEPING his COMMANDMENTS and by treating others like I would like to be treated”? I believe that would be a good start on the rest of my life, don’t you?