

Scripture Readings and Sermon

March 20, 2022 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Isaiah 55:1-9

Starting at chapter 35 and continuing with chapter 40, the last part of Isaiah is directed to those who had been in exile in Babylon. Themes of comfort and a fresh start permeate this section of Isaiah. Following the chapter on the "Suffering Servant" (52:13-53:12) which closely parallels the life of Jesus, those returning from exile are invited to seek the Lord. There is no charge for milk and wine and no need for money because it is their land. They are once again invited to enter the promised land. This time, however, the covenant is not restricted to the house of David (2 Samuel 7) but all who call upon the Lord. For those who doubt Isaiah's claim that God will pardon all who repent or forsake their wicked ways, the Isaiah reminds the listener that God's ways are not our ways. In other words, God can do anything God wants to do and is not restricted by human legal interpretations. For Christians, this invitation comes through the "Suffering Servant" Jesus.

Isaiah 55:8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

Do you know anyone who doesn't need to study the bible because they know it?

Can we ever fully know a book that speaks about an unknowable God?

If God is infinite, how far are God's thoughts from our limited thoughts?

Do you now understand things better than when you were younger?

When have you been confused by a bible reading?

Could it be that we are not yet mature enough to understand?

Commentary on Luke 13:1-9

After addressing hypocrisy in 11:29-12:12, Jesus is asked about material possessions. Jesus responds by pointing out that there are no material possessions in heaven and that God will provide. This section ends with the well known saying about the needlessness of worry and that the most important thing is to seek the Kingdom of God (12:22-34). While Jesus tells the listener not to worry about material things, he warns them that they should focus on their relationship with God. That relationship will be revealed when the end comes for no one knows when the master will return. It is in this context that Jesus gives the parable of the unfruitful fig tree. While the people question him about why bad things happen (tainted sacrifices and collapsing towers), Jesus challenges them to think about why good things are not being done by believers. The purpose of the tree is not to question the nature of the storm but to produce fruit in the appropriate season. It is not the storm that will destroy the tree but the owner who finds no fruit.

Luke 13:7 For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down!

Have you ever lost your patience?

Maybe in a line that moves so slow or a package that is lost in shipping?

Has it become worse now that we are accustomed to a faster pace of life?

Do you remember having to look up a word or wait until you got to a phone?

Are we losing our ability to have patience with ourselves and others?

How great is the grace that Jesus waits for us?

Commentary on 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

In the previous chapter, Paul talks about his freedom from the law in Christ but how for the sake of the Gospel he has become all things to all men. It is not the law that holds him captive but the love of God in Jesus Christ. Paul then shows a parallel to the Exodus story when the Israelites were freed from Pharaoh. All were freed through the Red Sea and all drank from the rock just as Christians are

freed through the cross and we all filled with the Holy Spirit. The Exodus story continues, however, in Numbers with the people longing for the certainty of captivity rather than the personal responsibility of freedom. So too, new Christians often long for the certainty of laws and ritual rather than the daily call to be in an active relationship with God through Jesus Christ. When we forget the love that God has given us, we create new idols to fall in love with. Why? Because if we create the idols than we can control the idols. These false idols are used to justify actions and provide excuses for inaction. A living God, however, calls us to daily accountability. For Paul, freedom is not an excuse to do what we want but the opportunity to be whom God is calling us to become.

1 Corinthians 10:13 God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

Have you ever been tested beyond your strength?

Did you find a strength deep within you that you never knew?

If God is the source of our strength, what is too great for us?

Do you feel that God sometimes believes in you more than you do?

If God has faith in us, why do we doubt God and ourselves?

Reflection on Isaiah 55:1-9, Luke 13:1-9, 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Sermon "Second Chances"

Our God is a God of second chances. The unfruitful fig tree is given one more year. The Jews who were in exile in Babylon because of their disobedience were called back to the promised land in Isaiah. Those who stayed in Egypt after the famine and became slaves were given new life through the Exodus recalled by Paul. All three of these scriptures provide the promise of hope if the people change their ways and walk with God.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul recalls how even though the slaves were given a new life free from pharaoh they misused that freedom and died. The lesson to be learned is even though we have been given a new life in Christ, we must stand firm in our faith and not fall back on old habits and prejudices that bring death.

In Isaiah, God is offering a new life in their own land where they no longer have to pay for food and wine but can grow it themselves. Not only does God offer them land but an everlasting covenant if they turn from their sinful ways and follow God. For God's ways are not the ways of the world and God's thoughts are not the wisdom of the world.

If we are therefore called to follow God's ways and stand firm in Christ, then Jesus tells us we must produce the fruit of that new life. The fruit we are called to produce is the love revealed in Jesus Christ and manifested in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Even when evil surrounds us either by the acts of people like Pilate or acts of nature like the collapsing tower, we are called not to complain about the evil around us but to produce the fruit of compassion and love for those that are hurting. While evil seeks to rob us of hope, if we stand firm, follow God's ways, and produce the fruit of Jesus' love than we will transform our world and glorify God.