

Bible Tuesday for Pentecost 11, 2019

Isaiah 58:9-14

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, ¹⁰if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. ¹¹The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. ¹²Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

¹³If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; ¹⁴then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

These verses begin Third Isaiah, that is, the part of the prophecy of Isaiah written from Jerusalem after the Israelites exiled to Babylonia had returned and the reconstruction of Jerusalem had not gone very well. The returning of the exiles from Babylonia was somewhat like the interred Japanese returning to their homes and businesses after WWII. However, the Japanese were all different socio-economic levels, and they were gone for a few years. Nevertheless, some found their homes and businesses taken over by others and had uphill battles to reclaim them. The Israelites who were taken into exile were the rich and powerful, the political and religious leaders and they had been gone for almost 50 years. When they returned, they reasserted themselves as the ruling class and were met with much resistance.

This pericope gives some indications of what went wrong. There was quite a bit of finger pointing and blaming going on. There was hoarding of food and resources. Reconstruction has been very slow. In these verses, God promises “ruins shall be rebuilt” but that it is conditional on the Israelites obeying the Law. “Honor the sabbath, tend to those in need, speak the truth, admit your own fault and turn from it. Then I will dwell in your land and bless you.”

Psalms 103:1-8

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

²Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—

³who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,

⁴who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

⁵who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

⁶The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.

⁷He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.

⁸The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

“This is a hymn of praise for God’s nature, and for His acts on behalf of Israel and contains both quotes and allusions to Exodus and Isaiah.” Hebrew Study Bible

Nephesh – This word is frequently translated “soul” but “soul” is fraught with baggage from folk lore and Dante’s writings. In Hebrew, “nephesh” means everything that is you: your past, your memories, your present, your future, your physical self, your aspirations, your abilities and talents. Whereas “soul” is usually understood to refer to that of us that is immortal, “nephesh” refers to the entirety of each individual. In the first verse of this psalm, the Hebrew states

Bless the Lord, O my nephesh, and nephesh bless God’s holy name.

The psalmist goes on, admonishing him/herself to bless God for all of God’s qualities, grace, salvation, love, mercy, vindication, and justice.

Bless – To “bless” is to not only speak words of good for another, but to work good for another.

Hebrews 12:18-29

You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, ¹⁹and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. ²⁰(For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death.”²¹ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”)

Here the author speaks of ancient Hebrew events where they physically encountered manifestations of God: the burning bush, the pillar of fire in the wilderness, the darkness/gloom/tempest of God’s presence on Mount Horeb/Sinai giving the law to Moses.

²²But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven,

The firstborn who are enrolled in heaven refers to all who are heirs of God and redeemed by Christ.

and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,

The spirits of the righteous made perfect refers to all who have already died in faith, therefore made perfect by God’s grace through Jesus Christ.

²⁴and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

In the Hebrew scriptures and in Paul's letters, Abel's blood is said to cry to God for vengeance against Cain, his killer. But Jesus' blood speaks words of forgiveness and restoration.

²⁵See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven!

Noah warned those who were going to be consumed by flood. The prophets warned Israel and Judah of their fates if they did not turn to God with all their hearts and selves. Now the writer of Hebrews warns that followers of Jesus heed him/her and accept God's word.

²⁶At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." ²⁷This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what is shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

This appears to refer to Hebrew tradition as opposed to scripture. It may refer to The Day of the Lord which in Christianity is also understood to be the final Judgment Day.

²⁸Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe;²⁹ for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

Luke 13:10-17

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. ¹¹And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. ¹²When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." ¹³When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. ¹⁴But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." ¹⁵But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? ¹⁶And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" ¹⁷When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

The verses immediately preceding this are filled with a teaching from Jesus. The disciples joined their contemporary Jews, Romans, and Greeks in the belief that an early, accidental death was a judgment from the gods, for the Jews it was a judgment from God, against those who died. Jesus is disgusted by this and tells a parable in response. The parable is of the landowner and a worker who argue over an non-producing fig tree. "Leave it alone one

more year while I dig around it and put manure on it. If it won't produce figs after that, cut it down."

The above event happens right on the heels of that parable, illustrating Jesus' point and giving further example of this errant belief. Jesus heals a woman with horrible osteoporosis hobbling around for 18 years without the benefit of a walker or smooth roads and walk ways. Jesus does this on the sabbath in a local synagogue. The president of the synagogue is indignant at the disruption to the worship service and the unseemly breaking of the sabbath commandment.

In the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus' ministry only lasts one year. During that year he is traveling all over the Israelite lands under the Roman Empire, looking for fruit of faith in God, love for God and for fellow human beings. This story shows that Jesus is finding no fruit, at least not among the religious leaders.

Hypocrites – In the gospel of Luke, the word "hypocrite" is key. It is not used against lay people but against Israelite clergy, the Sadducees, Pharisees, synagogue leaders, and priests. These are the people that are demanding strict adherence to the Law of Moses by the commoners but create all kinds of ways around the law for themselves. They also demand adherence to the letter of the Law and commands, but miss the purpose of the Law, the guide Israelites into right relationship with God and all creation. Jesus comes looking for love, mercy, grace, reform, from Israelite leadership and instead finds merciless judgment and corruption.