

Bible Tuesday for Pentecost 2, 2019

Isaiah 65:1-9

I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation that did not call on my name. I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices; a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and offering incense on bricks; who sit inside tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat swine's flesh, with broth of abominable things in their vessels; who say, "Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you." These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all day long. See, it is written before me: I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will indeed repay into their laps their iniquities and their ancestors' iniquities together, says the Lord; because they offered incense on the mountains and reviled me on the hills, I will measure into their laps full payment for their actions.

Thus says the Lord: As the wine is found in the cluster, and they say, "Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it," so I will do for my servants' sake, and not destroy them all. I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah inheritors of my mountains; my chosen shall inherit it, and my servants shall settle there.

The previous chapter of Isaiah has the exiled Israelites returning from Babylonia to the ruins of Israel arguing with God. They ask, "Our holy Temple, our pride, where our fathers praised You, has been consumed by fire, and all that was dear to us is ruined. At such things will You restrain Yourself, O Lord? Will You stand idly by and let us suffer so heavily?" The above passage is the beginning of God's response to this charge.

The prophecy of Isaiah explains that Yahweh, the God of all upon which the Israelites call, abandoned the Israelites by favoring the Babylonians and allowing them to conquer Israel, thus carrying out God's punishment of them. Israel rejects this action of God's but in the above passage, God gives a brief overview of the sins for which Israel has been punished.

While the Israelites view God as their own deity, Yahweh/God explains that God is Lord and creator of all. God assumed the prayer posture and stretches out God's arms to Israelites who reject God. The sins of sacrificing in gardens, sitting in tombs to pray to dead ancestors, etc., are all pagan worship practices which many Israelites adopted from the Canaanites. "Keep to yourself, do not come near me for I am holier than you!" is a warning this pagan worshipping Israelites were uttering to their faithful Jewish neighbors. For these and other sins, God punished Israel.

"Into their laps" – When I was little, I always wore skirts to church and to special occasions. I quickly learned how to spread my knees while in a seated position to use my skirt as a kind of net, catching things that my hands might miss. Hebrew men and women wore long, flowing clothing that worked well to catch and carry things bought in the market or gifted. Here God will pour into their ready laps punishment for betraying God and perverting God's relationship with them.

Psalm 22:19-28

But you, O Lord, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid!

Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog!

Save me from the mouth of the lion! From the horns of the wild oxen rescued me.

I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

This is the psalm that Jesus quotes from the cross. “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabbachthani?!” which is the Aramaic for the first line of this psalm, “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?!” This Sunday we read this section of the psalm, the end of the lament and the beginning of praise to God, because it voices the life of the man from the Garasenes (region of the Sea of Galilee) in the gospel.

This psalm is attributed to King David and thought to be from the time when he was on the run from King Saul. Later Jewish tradition taught that David composed this psalm after God revealed to him the upcoming centuries of Jewish suffering. Whether David or another wrote it, the psalmist writes from a place of great sorrow. “The sword” and “the power of the dog”, “the mouth of the lion” and the “horns of the wild oxen” may be actual or metaphorical threats. The dog, lion, and oxen may also refer to scoffers who make the psalmist’s tragic lot even worse.

The promise of worshiping God if God saves becomes admonitions to all Israel to praise God because God does act. Mary’s Magnificat and Zechariah’s hymn, both in the first chapters of Luke, echo the praise of this psalmist to God who tends the afflicted and the poor. In this way, Yahweh is very different than other deities. Suffering was believed to be punishment from the gods for evil deeds, or capriciousness on the part of the gods, but Yahweh tends the suffering and lifts them up. Suffering is not God’s punishment but rather a call to God to act.

“All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord...” – All the peoples of the earth will take heed and recall what God has done for those who suffer. They will worship God for God’s mercy and benevolence. God is not only the God of Israel, but of all peoples.

Galatians 3:23-29

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

In this section of Paul's letter to the congregation in Galatia, Paul addresses a major issue in the early church: must Gentiles convert to Judaism in order to be baptized into Jesus Christ? Jesus was Jewish and he fulfilled the Law of God presented in the Jewish sacred scriptures, that is, Jesus was the Jewish messiah and Lord. So, it stands to reason that all who would believe into Jesus must become Jewish and live under Jewish Law so that they might partake in Jesus' fulfillment of that law. However, even in Jewish scripture, as in the above psalm, state that all nations will come to God, but it says nothing about those nations converting.

Paul teaches that the Law was the "disciplinarian" or "tutor". The Greek word being translated is a term which refers to the slave of a wealthy household that would guide the children of his master to the house of their personal teacher. The slave served as boss and guide for the child, but only between home and school. Paul likens the Jewish Law to this slave or "tutor". The Law is not the be all and end all of God's word to God's people. Rather, it is merely the guide to get people to the real teacher, God, Himself in Jesus, the Christ.

Therefore, adherence to the Jewish Law does not elevate Jews over Gentiles, but was the path guiding Jews to Jesus. Now that Jesus, himself, was present, the Law is no longer necessary. Faith alone is necessary, faith as gift through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, those groups which the Law created: male vs female, Jew vs. Gentile, slave vs. free no longer apply. In Jesus Christ, these sociological, economical, religious, sexual divisions are meaningless. Jesus loves, saves and frees all people equally for new life where all have equal status.

Luke 8:26-39

Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.

"They" are Jesus and the disciples, men and women. Gerasa is a Gentile territory east of the Sea of Galilee.

As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs.

This Gerasene man was severely crippled by demons, a raving lunatic who ran around naked and couldn't handle life in town anymore. Instead he found shelter in the local caves that served as tombs. These behaviors of public nudity and living among the dead made him reprehensible and ritually unclean to Jews. Jesus' disciples were appalled by him.

When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me”— for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man.

In the gospel of Luke, only Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth, and the angel Gabriel recognize Jesus as “Son of God”. Yet, here is the Gentile crazy man who knows exactly who Jesus is and calls him by title!

(For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.)

My cousin, who is a schizophrenic, describes his mental illness as driving him to do things against his will.

Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” He said, “Legion”; for many demons had entered him.

Jesus is talking to this guy! Someone acting in such a disturbing manner had to be cursed through this world and into the next by the gods, maybe even Yahweh. Any sane person would have taken the gods at their word and left a very wide berth around this guy. Jesus’ disciples had to be terrified, appalled, and shocked all at the same time.

They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

The abyss was the nothingness of that which was not or no longer created. Jews believed that those who died untimely deaths, that is, deaths caused by curse of God, went to the nothingness of the abyss.

Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission.

Thus far in this story, the actual man has not spoken, only the demons which possess him. The demons would rather enter pigs, than be cast into nothingness.

Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country.

The swine herder may or may not have owned the animals he was tending. All of a sudden the whole herd dove off a cliff like a pack of lemmings! What a disaster for him!

Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid.

The chaos of demon possession has been restored to the order of God’s will personified in Jesus. Neither religion, nor demon possession, not even ethnicity repels Jesus from the desperate need of this man.

Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear.

They meet the power of God in person and are terrified! Instead of being attracted by the man’s healing, they are repelled!

So he got into the boat and returned.

God does not force God’s self on anyone.

The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for

you.” So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

How incredibly hard it must have been for that man to go back to the very people that bound him in chains and ejected him from their society. Not only does Jesus send him back to them, but Jesus sends him to be their angel, their messenger to proclaim, “The Kingdom of Heaven has drawn near, near enough to completely heal me!”