

All In

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost Proper 14 C
August 7, 2022

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Isaiah 1:1, 10-20 (NRSV)

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. ¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! ¹¹ 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. ¹² When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, ¹⁷ learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; ²⁰ but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Luke 12:32-40 (NRSV)

[Jesus said to his disciples,] “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ 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. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ³⁵ “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶ 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.³⁷ 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.³⁸ If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.³⁹ **“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.”**⁴⁰ You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Our Old Testament reading and our gospel this morning present us with two realities of the character of God that come at us from two very different directions. In this first chapter of Isaiah, God is talking to people he calls the “rulers of Sodom” and the “people of Gomorrah.” Those two cities are the proverbial bad examples of terrible sinfulness. We associate them with sexual sin, but that’s not the half of it. In Ezekiel 16:49 the Lord says Sodom **“had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.”** No, the Lord isn’t speaking here to literal Sodom and Gomorrah. He’s addressing the people of Judah in the 8th century B.C. These are God’s people, who worship him at the temple in Jerusalem.

To put it mildly, God is displeased with the way they are worshiping him. He says, **“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.”** He goes so far as to tell them he’s not going to even pay attention when they pray to him. God is clearly displeased with his chosen covenant people. What does he want? He tells them in verses 16-19: **“Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, 17 learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. 18 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. 19 If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land.”**

But at the end of our reading he gives them a solemn warning: **“But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”** So this is the first reality about himself that God is presenting us with this morning. It comes from the direction of his absolute holiness and his awful majesty and judgment for sin—specifically, the sin of neglecting the poor. But the warning comes with a promise: if they change their ways, **“though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow.”**

The second reality comes from the opposite direction, from God's love and mercy and extravagant generosity towards his people. We hear it in Jesus' words in the first verse of our gospel reading: **"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.** Just the way he addresses us makes you feel good doesn't it? **"Do not be afraid, little flock."** And God is our Father, and it's his **"good pleasure"** to give us the kingdom. The kingdom of God is that spiritual realm where everything happens exactly the way God wants it to happen. It's where **"thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"** is the way things work, every day, all day. It's the realm where there is no fear, no judgment, no poverty or anxiety or anger or hurt. And our heavenly Father wants to give it—to us!

Which of these two realities do we prefer? We might be tempted to say the second. We might be tempted to say they're different because Scripture shows us two different Gods. The Old Testament God is full of anger and judgment and the New Testament God is full of love. But we'd be wrong. There's only one God. Remember what Jesus himself said about the Old Testament: **"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished."** (Matthew 5:17-18) As our collect for Proper 28 on page 236 of the Prayer Book tells us, God **"caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning."** So let's listen to both these realities of God this morning, and learn from them. Let's open our hearts to both of them and let them change us to be more like the people God created us to be, to be more like God.

What is the Lord saying here? He's saying that these two realities lead us to a third, wonderful and blessed reality about God's character. It's clear from the first chapter of Isaiah that faithless worship, worship for our own purposes, is worse than just empty or worthless. God hates it. It's an abomination. It repels him. Why? Because these people who claim the Lord as their God are shutting their eyes to the poor and needy. Their focus is instead on themselves. They've become idolators. They're worshipping themselves.

But when we see the heart of our loving Father behind Jesus's words in our gospel reading, we see God is using his majesty and holiness to spur us to be "all in" for him and his agenda. And being "all in" for God and his agenda is the locus, the center of God's kingdom. How much more "all in" can you be than to sell all your possessions and give to the poor? What's the result? **"Unfailing treasure in heaven."**

God's desire for us to be "all in" for him and his agenda comes out in Jesus' metaphor of the household slaves waiting for the master to come home from a wedding. Presumably he's been gone for a long time. Might they be tempted to drink one of his

beers from the refrigerator? Or maybe go for a drive in his car? Or watch a movie on his TV in his favorite chair? In other words, might they not be tempted to make themselves at home in his home? To use his things for their purposes? Maybe they are. Jesus doesn't tell us.

Instead, he describes the blessing waiting for those slaves who are alert and waiting when the master returns. They're not treating his household as though it were their own. They're doing with his household what he wants done. And what's the blessing that awaits them? He will **“have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them.”** To Luke's first-century readers, this is a shocking and total reversal of role. The idea that a master would serve slaves was unheard of to the people who first heard Jesus say this.

So what do we learn from these opposing realities? Three things. **First**, we aren't in charge. Jesus is. This world, every person, we ourselves, are God's. Because that's true, we can expect God to show up anywhere, any time in our lives. We must be ready.

Second, God has an agenda. You can read about it in the 28th chapter of Matthew, where Jesus says, **“Go into all the world and make disciples of all people, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.”** It's restated in the Prayer for Mission on page 816 of the Prayer Book. We'll pray that in a minute, so please turn there now. **And third**, God wants us “all in” on his mission agenda. The reason is simple: in his death on the cross for our sins, and his resurrection from the dead, Jesus demonstrates God's extravagant love and generosity to us.

It is God himself who intervenes to save his people from their sin. Just before he addresses the **“leaders of Sodom”** and **“people of Gomorrah”** Isaiah says this: **“If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we would have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.”** (Isaiah 1:9) God has taken the initiative. We are not living in those doomed cities. He rescues us in Christ to be survivors, members of his **“little flock.”** He has judged the sin of his people in the cross of Christ.

Jesus gave everything so you and I could be forgiven and receive his eternal life. Through Isaiah, the Lord was castigating his people for neglecting the poor. Who are the poor? Scripture tells us it's us, and that Jesus sold all his possessions—his very life—to give to the poor: **“For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”** (2 Corinthians 8:9) Jesus endured what for us is unimaginable terror and privation and suffering to bring us into his kingdom, so he could call us his **“little flock”** and give us the kingdom. God calls us to be “all in” for Jesus because he's “all in” for us.

The poor, those who don't know Jesus, are all around us. Let's share with them the wealth God has blessed us with in Jesus.

Please turn to the Prayer for Mission on page 816. Let us pray.

Everliving God, whose will it is that all should come to you through your Son Jesus Christ: Inspire our witness to him, that all may know the power of his forgiveness and the hope of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.