

TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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BIBLE READING FELLOWSHIP
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By Ashley Rogers

Good News Daily

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Sunday, January 22

Isaiah 47:1-15 *“Your ‘wisdom’ and ‘knowledge’ have caused you to turn away from me and claim, ‘I am self-sufficient and not accountable to anyone!’ So disaster will overtake you.”* (vv.10b-11a NLT)

Today’s passages from Isaiah and Hebrews are sobering. Specifically, they speak to the claim that no eternal standard or judge exists, that right and wrong lie most appropriately within the parameters of each individual’s opinion.

This point of view certainly has some appeal, in that it enables its adherents to follow whichever behavior seems good at the moment. On the other hand, absent a judge, on what basis can even genocide be condemned?

Part of the hard task of being a Christian is knowing that there is a real truth, and that it is our obligation to strive for it, even though we must do so humbly, knowing that we often miss the mark. Christians may disagree about exactly what constitutes right and wrong in a given moral dilemma or social issue, but we *do* agree that there is a right and wrong which ought to be debated. The Good News is that, in Scripture, we have the foundation on which truth is based and the opportunity to get to know the Judge.

Psalms 63:1-11, 98; Hebrews 10:19-31; John 5:2-18

Monday, January 23

Galatians 1:1-17 *Dear brothers and sisters, I want you to understand that the gospel message I preach is not based on mere human reasoning. I received my message from no human source, and no one taught me. Instead, I received it by direct revelation from Jesus Christ.* (vv.11-12)

A lifelong journey with Christ will always need both human reason and supernatural experience. Here Paul emphasizes his personal encounters with God. But the apostle did not hesitate to use his finely tuned mind. His letters, in particular the letter to the Romans, represent classic Greek argument at its finest. We cannot have one without the other and remain spiritually healthy. If we seek perfect knowledge of historical or theological issues at the expense of worship, we become dry bones with little joy. If we seek heightened experience of God without grappling with the tougher issues of the Christian faith, we become a house built upon sand which cannot withstand the floods life inevitably brings. Ultimately, of course, there are mysteries which neither reason nor experience can penetrate in this life. This admission is hard for all of us. It is by the grace of God that we are blessed with an intellect to help us on our journey as well as the wondrous gift of the Holy Spirit that demonstrates God’s love, holiness, and nearness.

Isaiah 48:1-11; Psalms 41, 52; Mark 5:21-43

Tuesday, January 24

Mark 6:1-13 *“But if any place refuses to welcome you or listen to you, shake its dust from your feet as you leave to show that you have abandoned those people to their fate.”* (v.11)

We have in this passage a key point about evangelism: acceptance of the gospel message cannot be forced upon anyone. There are no biblical examples of coerced conversion. Rather, we are to be passionate about our message, loving in the delivery, living in accordance with the teachings of the church, and trusting that it is God, not we, who draws human beings to Christ.

Jewish people have especially suffered from over-zealous attempts at conversion by Christians down through the ages. Through increasingly honest relationships with Jewish people I have learned, to my shame, that centuries-old hurts of this nature still exist. The pain they feel is not just from the anti-Semitism of the faithless medieval church, but from tactless blundering in our own day.

Sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ is to be done in love and understanding. There is a saying that we are to

go to God with the person before we go to the person with God. That means understanding where that person is coming from in his or her faith belief and sharing those spiritual realities we have in common as well as gently encouraging them on to greater truth.

Isaiah 48:12-21; Psalm 45; Galatians 1:18–2:10

Wednesday, January 25

Psalm 119:49-72 *O Lord, the earth is full of your unfailing love; teach me your principles. I believe in your commands: now teach me good judgment and knowledge. You are good and do only good; teach me your principles.* (vv.64, 66, 68)

What seems so valuable in this psalm is, first, that the author understood God’s essential goodness. Accepting God’s goodness is a prerequisite for accepting anything else about God. How can a relationship with God be sustained if, beneath it all, there lies the nagging suspicion that He may do us harm?

What also seems valuable here is that the writer understood how completely our minds need to be changed about the world and our purpose in it. Naturally, we serve ourselves. Naturally, we value others based upon entirely subjective standards (“How intelligent is he?” or “Where does she live?”). Doing this creates a prison which ultimately holds us captive as well, for which of us can stand before the arbitrary judgments of other human beings?

The psalmist is asking, “God, teach me how You think about the world! What is valuable? What is good? What is Your viewpoint?” How wonderful that God, in His goodness, offers to heal our world views.

Isaiah 49:1-12; Galatians 2:11-21; Mark 6:13-29

Thursday, January 26

Isaiah 49:13-23 *Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for a child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you! See, I have written your name on my hand.* (vv.15-16a)

This image of God the nurturer, the lover, the pursuer, is painted throughout Holy Scripture. Israel is likened to a bride. God spoke through Hosea, “I am the one who looks after you and cares for you” (Hosea 14:8). Jesus

cried, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks” (Matthew 23:37).

This God is a far cry from what some people think of as either the “angry god of the Old Testament” or the wan Jesus of turn-of-the-century portraiture. Amazingly, God’s love for us is more perfect than our love for any human being.

So, what does this mean? It means that we can trust Him. Behind any terrible experience or any disappointment, behind even death itself, the passion of God for us will always move to heal and to restore. He means to make us partners in this process of healing and restoring the world. As Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote in his famous “Wreck of the Deutschland,” a poem which recounts a tragedy at sea, “...past all Grasp God, throned behind Death with a sovereignty that heeds but hides, bodes but abides...”

Psalm 50; Galatians 3:1-14; Mark 6:30-46

Friday, January 27

Isaiah 50:1-11 *I can turn rivers into deserts covered with dying fish. I am the one who sends darkness out across the skies. Watch out, you who live in your own light!* (vv.2, 11)

The prophet Isaiah, explaining to the nation of Judah why it had been carried into Babylonian slavery in 586 B.C., described the fierce power of the Creator. We all know those passages, but somehow we never think this force of holiness will stand against us!

We need to think again. While Psalms 40 and 54 in today’s readings reassure us that God is with those who call upon Him, Isaiah’s prophetic word reminds us that God stands against us when we defy Him.

What constitutes “defiance” is, of course, particular to each person. For one it may be a sexual sin, for another vanity, for another exchanging the possibility of Christ’s riches for a life of empty pursuit. The point is, God knows, and does not like it.

The first evangelists knew this. While they went about proclaiming that the love of God had dwelt among us, that God had descended to depths to rescue us, they still

could say, in the words of the writer of Hebrews, “Our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29).

Psalms 40, 54; Galatians 3:15-22; Mark 6:47-56

Saturday, January 28

Mark 7:1-23 *“It is what comes from inside that defiles you.”* (v.20)

This passage describes the growing conflict between Jesus and the arbitrators of Jewish law, known as the Pharisees. The Pharisees concerned themselves chiefly with the ritual uncleanness brought upon the Jewish people by Roman occupation. From a first century Jewish perspective, the Roman presence signified more than the lack of political freedom: the very presence of Gentiles rendered both the inhabitants and the land of Israel unclean. The Pharisees sought to maintain Jewish sanctification by enforcing the letter of the Jewish law, hoping to maintain religious identity.

Jesus responded to the Pharisees harshly. He pointed out that what separated them from God did not come from externals, and therefore could not be remedied by religious observance. As the prophet Joel wrote, “Rend your hearts and not your garments!” (Joel 2:13).

I think we can all have a little sympathy for the Pharisees. They were trying to please God in many ways. They were trying to preserve a community of faith in the midst of terrible odds. It is so important that, as we try to please God, we do so without expecting to manipulate the results or control the outcome. Salvation, thank God, comes by grace: our reliance on God’s power rather than our own.

Isaiah 51:1-8; Psalm 55; Galatians 3:23-29

In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer we pray for the Church of North India (United)

In the Diocesan Cycle of Prayer we pray for St. Christopher’s, Springfield

CURRENT PRAYER LIST

Alice, Anne, Becky, Betty, Bob, Bonnie, Bruce, Caroline, Carrie, Cathy, Christine, Colette, Connie, Craig, Dabney, Dan, David, Davis, Debbie, Deborah, Debra, Dee, Doris,

Elaine, Erik, Frank, Holly, James, Jan, Janet, Jennifer, John, Johnny, Jon, Josh, Kathleen, Kathy, Kathy M., Kelly, Kylie, Laura, Lauralei, Linda, Lisa, Lynn, Mara, Marilyn, Megan, Michael, Mike, Mother Cynthia, Nancy, Nanette, Nick, Nikki, Paula, Phil, Rachel, Ralph, Randall, Raymond, Rich, Richard, Robert, Rusty, Samantha, Sharon, Sonja, Steve, Tom, Vaughan, Veronica, Vic, Wendy, Wesley, Anne R. Adams, Dave Adams, John Allen, Susan Anderson, Chuck B., Brian Baldwin, Maria Barnhart, Waldo Beck, Kevin Byrne, Angie Campbell, Mo Cowie, George & Martha Cox, John Crigler, Claire Curcio and Selby McCash, Sharon D., Alda Dell, Adrienne Dever, Rosaleigh Diaz, Robin Dournaux, Neil Edwards, The Farr Family, Allan & Holly Feliciano, Pearle Galatas, Rose Gallup, Dorothy Gassel, Alice Glover, Jenny Grant, Janice Graves, Tony Griswold, Barbara Harkins, Walt & Karen Harrison, Bernadine Hayes, Emily Hinkley, Barry Holliday, Edward Homendy, David Hunt, Janet Jones, Russ Kidd, Scott Kizner, Lois L., David & Marion Mangum, Sophie Manning, Karen Maxey, Jack McGraw, Bill Miller, Godwin Nosa, Heather Cameron Ploen, Winifred Relyea, Tina Revis, David Roberts, Russell Roberts, Nancy Russler, Danny Sass, Marianne Simpson, Anne Smith, Cathy Smith, Karla Snellings, Sherry Tanner, Patsy Thompson, May Jane Tillman, Rosemary Van Brunt, Susy Vargas-Soliz, Teara & Caia Venaglia, James Monroe Walls, Kelly Weber, Alda White, Carol Whitaker, Alva Windham

BIRTHDAYS

January 23rd - Matthew Brewer

January 25th - Pat Weber

January 27th - Mark Bennett, Michael Homendy

January 28th - Marti Harrington

January 29th - Allan Feliciano

January 30th - Luke Jasso

January 31st - Anne Aberg, Nancy Breaux

ANNIVERSARY

January 28th - Randall and Sug Clingenpeel