

**Sermon for Morning Prayer
Passion Sunday (Lent V)**

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the tenth Verse of the first Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.²

“Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

“Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the fourth Chapter of the First Epistle General of St. Peter.³

“... Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.”⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:⁵

Isaiah opens opens his great book of prophecy with nine verses of a terrifying denunciation of the Kingdom of Judah: He appeals to heaven and earth⁶ to witness to the corrupt, decayed, state of the nation, predicting its future as a land ground under the heels of foreign invaders by picturing

--oo0oo--

The Rev’d Canon John A. Hollister¹⁸
March 29, 2009.

¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER x (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² Isaiah 1:10-20 (KJV).

³ I Peter 4:12-19 (KJV).

⁴ Isaiah 1:11 (KJV).

⁵ The author is indebted for these insights to *Derek Kidner, Isaiah*, D. GUTHRIE AND J.A. MOTYER, EDs., THE NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY: REVISED 3rd ed. 591-92 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1970).

⁶ Isaiah 1:2.

⁷ *Ibid.* 1:9.

⁸ *Ibid.* (RSV).

⁹ *Kidner, ibid.*

¹⁰ Isaiah 1:10.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 11-14 (RSV).

¹² Psalm 50:9-13(RSV).

¹³ Isaiah 1:15 (RSV).

¹⁴ Psalm 50: 16-17, 21 (RSV).

¹⁵ Isaiah 1:16-17 (RSV).

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 18-20.

¹⁷ Psalm 50:14-15 (RSV).

¹⁸ Priest Assistant, Christ Anglican Catholic Church, Metairie LA. Honorary Canon, the Diocese of the Resurrection, and Honorary Canon and Canon to the Ordinary, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church.

This assurance of acceptance by God is affirmed by the Psalmist:

“Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High; and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will glorify me.”¹⁷

Conclusion:

As it was for the Judeans of Isaiah’s day, so it is for us. Our nation is on the point of collapse, beset by crises that are directly traceable to our own improvidence and folly. We are threatened by armed enemies, although in our case they are more likely to be terrorists than invading armies, but they promise to wreak havoc among us just the same.

Our leaders lie to us, seeking to cover up their own complicity in our decline, and go through useless motions to conceal the fearful fact that they have no real solutions to offer us. Our moral compass has been demagnetized, and our moral understanding has been desensitized, as true faith and worship have not only disappeared from the public scene but have been actively hunted into hiding.

As was the answer to the Hebrews’ woes, so is the answer to ours. We must turn again to the Lord, attending to His commands, repenting of our sins, amending our own lives, and worshipping Him in humility and truth.

If we can bring ourselves to do that, then we, like the Judeans, will be accepted by God back into the comfort and security of the Covenant and He will protect us and provide for our essential needs.

The repentance of the nation begins in the home, at the bedside, where each of us pours out his or her heart to God, “meekly kneeling upon our knees.”

it as the bleeding body of a man who has been flogged or savagely beaten and who lies with his wounds untreated.

Even in this extremity, however, there will be hope for the future because the Lord will leave a remnant⁷ from which the nation can be rebuilt, a remnant. That remnant is symbolic of the Jerusalem which, despite the invasions and their accompanying devastation, will be left standing:

“If the Lord of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.”⁸ It is at this, with its small but important positive note, that today’s First Lesson picks up.

Theme:

In Isaiah’s day, Sodom and Gomorrah were by-words for the total destruction left by fires that rain from heaven, images with much of the power that Hiroshima, Dresden or Coventry might have in ours.⁹ By addressing the leaders of Judah as though they were the leaders of those cities,¹⁰ Isaiah is therefore using the strongest terms he can imagine to convince his hearers of the awe-filled fate that awaits them unless they repent and amend their ways.

Development:

Through Isaiah, God speaks in a rising crescendo of denunciations, beginning with His rejection of the very offerings of the nation’s worshippers:

“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord;
I have 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 he-goats.

When you come to appear before me, who requires of you this trampling of my courts?
Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me.
New moon and sabbath and the calling of assemblies – I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.
Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them.”¹¹

God’s words spoken through Isaiah echo those of the Psalmist:

“I will accept no bull from your house, nor he-goat from your folds.
For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.
I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine.
If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world and all that is in it is mine.
Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?”¹²

So Isaiah warns Judah that after God rejects the worshippers’ offerings, He will reject the worshippers themselves:

“When you spread forth you hands, I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.”¹³

This rejection, too, echoes the Psalmist:

“But to the wicked God says: ‘What right have you to recite my statutes, or take my covenant upon you lips?
For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you.

...
These things have you done and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself.
But now I rebuke you, and lay the charge before you.”¹⁴

Isaiah tells the about-to-be rejected worshippers that they may be reconciled to God, may be restored to the benefits of the Covenant, only through repentance for the things they have done that have affronted God, followed by a real commitment to amend their future lives, to live righteously henceforth after God’s commands:

“Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.”¹⁵

If the people repent and determine to amend their lives, to conform themselves to God’s desires for them, then their sins will be put away and forgotten:

“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow;
though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.
If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land;
But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord as spoken.”¹⁶