

Sermon for Morning Prayer
Trinity XXI

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifteenth Verse of the fifty-ninth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.²

“... And the Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment.

“And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence. So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.

“And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the tenth Chapter of the Second Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.³

“Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among

you, but being absent am bold toward you: But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's.... But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

✠Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

Sin separates but God saves...

In the verses prior to today's reading, Isaiah, the Prophet of Redemption, is being brutally blunt to God's chosen who are listening. Israel's sins are blocking her off from God and preventing God from saving her. All is bloodshed and lies, dishonesty and the creeping poison of corruption. Society cannot hold together when there is such a complete breakdown of moral standards. Everyone is bent on doing evil.

Israel is in deep moral darkness, blocked off from the light of God's truth, righteousness and justice.

In today's Old Testament reading God sees this desperate situation and that there is no one to take action.⁴ He decides to intervene -- coming to the rescue Himself armed with radical goodness, intent on salvation and swathed in righteous anger.⁵ He will sweep in like a cleaning flood, giving justice, righting wrongs and punishing the guilty.⁶ The Christ is coming! The Glory of The Church is prophesied!

And what will be the fate of Israel! He will act as her redeemer: her next of kin who saves her and pays her debts.⁷ He forges an everlasting bond with His people, to put His Spirit of Truth within them.⁸

I appeal to you...

In today's New Testament reading St. Paul turns again to an old theme – his authority as an apostle and the challenge from the so called “super-apostles”. The “super-apostles” are Jewish missionaries who have arrived at the church in Corinth since St. Paul left. On the surface they are knowledgeable, good-looking and eloquent. Underneath, they are devious and domineering.

The “super apostles” manage to mislead the Corinthians, because the Greeks like their gods to be powerful and perfect. They find it almost impossible to accept a God who gets crucified, and St. Paul (whom one person described as having a bald head, bandy legs and beetle brows) is a most unlikely Apostle!

Although the “super-apostles” present themselves as Christians, they have reworked the gospel for their own ends. The content of their message and the style of their ministry is not at all true to Christ and His gospel.

As St. Paul writes, we hear the echoes of the harsh things that have been said about him. We see also how he handles these criticisms – with humility, righteous indignation, plain facts and even a dry wit.

St. Paul talk's to the Corinthians very personally – not as “we” but as “I”.⁹ The Corinthian Church says that Paul is timid when he is with them and only forceful in his letters when he is away. But they completely misunderstand his gentleness. He will be bold enough when he sees them next, if he has to be!¹⁰

The “super-apostles” look good because they are only comparing themselves with one another. They are taking pride in a church which has already been established – by St. Paul. St. Paul has no desire to boast in another person's work. For him the only boast is what God has done for him through Jesus Christ – which he calls “boasting in the Lord”.¹¹

St. Paul refuses to compete with the “super-apostles” for the credit of planting the church at Corinth. His vision is already reaching ahead to new regions – to visit Rome and then take the gospel to Spain. If the work at Corinth expands, it will be because the Christians are supporting St. Paul's mission to other places. St. Paul lets the Corinthians know that a true apostle will reflect love, sacrifice, and sufferings of Jesus. This is also true for us as Christians today.

✠Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

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

² Isaiah 59: 15b-21 (KJV).

³ II Corinthians 10: 1-7, 17-18 (KJV).

⁴ Isaiah 59: 15-16.

⁵ Isaiah 59: 17.

⁶ Isaiah 59: 18-19.

⁷ Isaiah 59: 20.

⁸ Isaiah 59: 21.

⁹ II Cor. 10: 1.

¹⁰ II Cor. 10: 2.

¹¹ II Cor. 10: 17.

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