

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20; Luke 12:32-40

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

It's a time of political unrest, where one part of the people is actively working against the other part. There are those who are collaborating with people who are felt to be enemies of the state. There are very many - both those in office and those who are leaders of religion - who are simply giving lip service to their faith. The question, though, comes after having said all of that, where, and more precisely *when*, am I speaking of? Because, all of what I just said could be applied to current day Israel and Palestine, or India and Pakistan. I might be talking about the United States in the 1860's or England and her colonies in the late 1700's. But since I am a pastor and this is worship and we just read something from the Bible, you can probably guess that I am talking about the time from our first lesson. But it is kind of scary how much of what was happening to Isaiah in the 8th century BC that are things that are still happening in our world today.

In the book of Isaiah in that opening chapter as we heard it read it to us, we got a brief little quick rundown of some of the issues that were facing the people of Judea, particularly those in and around Jerusalem.

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."*

As obedient believers of the Lord God, the people are required to offer atonement for all of the wrong that they have done, and part of that atonement is to offer these sacrifices there in the altar in the temple in Jerusalem. It was the temple in Jerusalem because, first of all, that is where Isaiah's preaching, and second of all, the temple in Jerusalem is the ONLY acceptable place for sacrifice, at least according to any of the religious leaders of the day. The people are going about the whole sacrifice issue, apparently rather whole heartedly. They're tossing on bulls and rams and goats and sheep. All of these are being offered up, because it is the smell of the animal as it's burned and the smoke as it rises to heaven, that is supposed to be what is pleasing to the Lord God. Now some of these offerings are done in part so that those that take care of the temple can get something to eat, or so that the family that is offering up that sacrifice can throw a little bit of a "party" or what we call a bar-b-que in the Lord's honor. But a lot of those offerings, if you'll pardon the pun - the whole hog - the *entire* critter is being put there on the altar and the *entire* carcass is being burned so that there is nothing left for any of the temple workers to eat.

"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." The folks

have come up with new festivals to celebrate, new times to offer up those burnt critters. The problem here, though, is that those festivals are being based on non-Jewish customs. 'Hey, it's a summer solstice, let's throw another ram on to the altar and offer up some sacrifice.' 'NO,' says the Lord God, 'I don't really care what it is that you're doing or why, I've had it with all of these sacrifices. Because you're doing these things,' God says, 'you're giving these unnecessary offerings. Yet, while you're doing these offerings, you are not doing justice to your own people. And Not Doing Justice is what is driving a wedge between you and me,' the Lord God says to the people.

We don't necessarily get this in our reading tonight, but throughout at least the first 39 chapters of Isaiah and throughout many of the other books of the prophets and the history books, 1st & 2nd Kings and 1st & 2nd Chronicles, that the rich and the powerful and the mighty, they're doing really well. It's the widows and the orphans who are being left out. Those are the folks that repeatedly through the prophets the Lord tells the people to take care of them, to look out for them, to watch over them, and *repeatedly* the people ignore them. God says, 'Take care of these folks, these people out on the fringes, the poor, the widowed the disenfranchised, those who are ignored - or even worse, they're being used for Gain by the people who already have enough. There is nothing you can do,' says the Lord God, 'to wipe that stain off of your hands. I don't care how many rams or bulls you burn, you cannot wipe away that stain of sin unless and until you actively begin to help those who are in need, all those sacrifices are worthless.'

And lest we start to think that this was some kind of, "oh that word was for those back then, but it doesn't have anything to do with us today," remember how much life in the 8th century BC IS similar to 21st century North America. We can't be thinking that we're all that different than those folks as they were ticking off the Lord God. I *will* say that as a congregation I think that Trinity Church at least does a pretty good job of looking after our widows. We have a really good grief support group, and I know a lot of those folks strive actively to look in on each other. But that doesn't mean that the other thing that Isaiah was talking about, that worship IN AND OF ITSELF is acceptable to God. How are we as a congregation looking after the needs of the modern day orphans, of those who have been abandoned by the society, of the rejects of the community, of the folks who have been written off by the public as worthless or useless or not even being able to be seen as we walk down the streets? But what of us as individuals, to whom do we reach out when we see a person in trouble or in pain?

A good friend of mine just shared with me earlier this week how he had seen a friend of his on the verge of suicide and how he got this fellow into his car, got this person over to Holy Spirit Hospital and into the mental ward and got him the help that was needed. I think that is a wonderful, great, and amazing thing. *That's* the type of thing that God calls us to do. Yet I wonder about myself, if I am willing and able to do such a thing myself?

We have to be careful too, that we don't fall into the trap of 'oh, well, I know that I should go help that person, but I know that God will forgive me if I don't.' Because

when we do that we CHEAPEN the grace that has been given to us on the cross. God's love forgives us, and God's grace from the cross cleanses us, "*though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.*")V.18) God calls us to serve others, to look out for those that cannot look after themselves, but we are not earning our salvation, we have to be careful we do not fall into that trap. Yet still we are called to ACTION, we are called to Help the helpless, Feed the hungry, Cloth the naked, Listen to the person who is different from us, be a Friend to the one that is without one.

None of those things are easy. In doing those things, we have to give of ourselves. It takes time to love and to serve God as God calls us to. It requires that I give of my own time and of myself as well. The people in Isaiah's day needed to hear that message - that we can't just live as we want to and still claim to be believers. To be a believer, we are called to look out for one another, to love one another, and to serve God in all that we do. The people in Isaiah's day didn't want to hear that. The people in our day, we struggle with that too.

Amen.