

**Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, August 11, 2019,**

**Isaiah 1:1, 10-20; Psalm 50: 1-8, 23-24; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40**

How do you get the news about what is happening in God's world? I often read the news when I open my smart phone or computer, or hear it on the radio or television, or read it in a magazine. I no longer read a newspaper. And most of the time, the news is dark and depressing. It almost seems to always be bad news: news of mass shootings, separation of vulnerable immigrants from their children, violence, hatred and racism.

Sometimes it seems as if the world I grew up in and believed in is passing away. Whatever happened to the Statue of Liberty's saying on the pedestal written by Emma Lazarus, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."?

Today instead of the Statue of Liberty serving as the symbol of our nation's hospitality and welcome to immigrants we have the Wall as a symbol of our fear seeking to keep out of this country the very immigrants that Emma Lazarus talked about.

This is only one sign of the darkness of our times. What are we as people of faith called to do in response? In our lesson from Isaiah, the LORD God speaks to ancient Judah and the leadership in Jerusalem and called them "rulers of Sodom" and "people of Gomorrah." Sodom and Gomorrah are known as towns destroyed because of their lawlessness. The strong took advantage of the stranger and the vulnerable and served only their own needs. Even though the people of that time worshipped the LORD God with their sacrifices, they did so to serve themselves. Their worship did not reflect a desire to become like the LORD God in loving-kindness and mercy, but as a means to their own self-serving ends. Thus, the LORD God did not hear their prayers as legitimate and worthy. Can the prayers of this nation or any nation that is self-serving be worthy?

Does not our nation with the growing income inequality, the scapegoating of the vulnerable and the targeting of the stranger sound a lot like ancient Judah and Jerusalem? We as a people need to take a hard look at ourselves.

The beginning of wisdom is to know oneself. We are to confess our own self-centeredness and ask for forgiveness. And in so doing, we are to turn ceasing to do evil, learning to do good, seeking justice, rescuing the oppressed, defending the orphan and pleading for the vulnerable.

It may seem odd to us that the world is turning so dark. But in the biblical record, people of faith have more times than not had to contend with rulers who were evil and self-centered: Pharaoh, the kings of the ancient world, and the Roman Empire. In fact, the early church was so politically insignificant that it could not dare to imagine that it could stand up to Rome.

It may seem as if the powers of darkness are winning the day, but that doesn't mean that people of faith who trust in God and God's compassion are defeated. Victory over darkness isn't a result of our efforts alone, but of God's steadfast call for a world where God reigns.

In our gospel lesson for today, Jesus said, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 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. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Luke 12:32-34)

God's kingdom or reign is a gift from God. It does not depend on possessions or wealth. Things we own do not give us the kingdom. Seeing and loving our neighbor in right relationship, caring for one another is the treasure of God. Acts of kindness builds relationships. And although any act of kindness may seem small in the face of societal darkness, it is a way faithful people help build God's reign.

I was sharing how discouraged I could get by all the "bad news" in the news. And a friend told me about the seesaw at the border wall between El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. In response to the Wall being a symbol of separation, two professors Ron Rael, architecture professor from U.C. and Virginia San Fratello, design associate professor from San Jose State University built seesaws at the "wall." The "wall" there was actually a metal fence with the horizontal ball of the "wall" serving as a fulcrum for the seesaw. Children on both sides of the wall could play with children on the other side as they seesawed together. The seesaws at the border became a symbol of how connected we are in the human family, even with walls which try to separate us.

I want to note that this action of creating seesaws at the wall was a creative response to darkness which built relationships. It points to how we are connected despite the darkness in the world, which can also affect our hearts.

We have a choice about how we respond to the evil and darkness in the world. We can either have faith in the promises of God, "the assurance of things hoped for" (Hebrews 11:1) which is a world of human love and connection, or we can be overwhelmed by the "news" that the world is not safe, that strangers are to be feared and that we need to keep ourselves safe by creating walls.

This choice is important, because it directs the way we use our energy. Even when the wall was there, these professors imagined how a wall could be used to make connection. Before it became a reality, they had to hope for connection. In other words, they and we need to have the "conviction of things unseen." (Hebrews 11:1)

Even in the darkest of times, people of faith need to believe that love is possible, even the love of the "enemy" or other. Instead of becoming trapped by our fears, we are to live out God's hope for us. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that just as Abraham and Sarah had to trust in God's promise of heirs that would number as the stars of heaven, so too must we trust in the promise that it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. In other words, even before we can ever see it happen, we have to first trust in the promise of God's hope for us, and then faithfully act.

Remember little flock, "Do not be afraid." "For it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms." Find ways to give your life away to others creating connection and not separation. Make connections with others in your daily lives and trust that God is giving you the kingdom of relationships that we all need. In this way, we give hope that even in times of darkness God's love may prevail.

Amen.

**I propose to show that with all the bad news about the oppression and evil in the world, we the faithful are called to believe that God's reign will come, and trust that is the Father's good**

**pleasure to give the kingdom, so that in the midst of darkness we can be bearers of light giving hope.**

I would like to read to you the entire poem, *New Colossus* by Emma Lazarus written in 1883 to raise money for the construction of the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty which was given by the people of France to the people of the United States.

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand  
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command  
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she  
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

## **The Collect**

Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## **Old Testament**

### **Isaiah 1:1, 10-20**

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.

Hear the word of the Lord,  
you rulers of Sodom!  
Listen to the teaching of our God,  
you people of Gomorrah!  
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.

When you come to appear before me,  
    who asked this from your hand?  
    Trample my courts no more;  
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.  
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.  
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,  
    rescue the oppressed,  
defend the orphan,  
    plead for the widow.  
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.  
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 has spoken.

## **The Response**

### **Psalm 50:1-8, 23-24**

#### *Deus deorum*

1 The LORD, the God of gods, has spoken; \*  
    he has called the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

- 2 Out of Zion, perfect in its beauty, \*  
God reveals himself in glory.
- 3 Our God will come and will not keep silence; \*  
before him there is a consuming flame,  
and round about him a raging storm.
- 4 He calls the heavens and the earth from above \*  
to witness the judgment of his people.
- 5 "Gather before me my loyal followers, \*  
those who have made a covenant with me  
and sealed it with sacrifice."
- 6 Let the heavens declare the rightness of his cause; \*  
for God himself is judge.
- 7 Hear, O my people, and I will speak:  
"O Israel, I will bear witness against you; \*  
for I am God, your God.
- 8 I do not accuse you because of your sacrifices; \*  
your offerings are always before me.
- 23 Consider this well, you who forget God, \*  
lest I rend you and there be none to deliver you.
- 24 Whoever offers me the sacrifice of thanksgiving honors me; \*  
but to those who keep in my way will I show the salvation of God."

## **The Epistle**

### **Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16**

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old-- and Sarah herself was barren-- because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore."

All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

## The Gospel

### Luke 12:32-40

Jesus said to his disciples, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 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. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

"Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; 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. 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. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

"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. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

**In preparation for this coming Sunday's worship, please pray this coming Sunday's Collect of the Day and read and reflect on the lessons assigned as printed below**

### **The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80: 1-2, 8-18; Hebrews 11:29-12:2; Luke 12:49-56**

## The Collect

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

## Old Testament

### Isaiah 5:1-7

Let me sing for my beloved  
my love-song concerning his vineyard:  
My beloved had a vineyard  
on a very fertile hill.  
He dug it and cleared it of stones,  
and planted it with choice vines;  
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,  
and hewed out a wine vat in it;  
he expected it to yield grapes,  
but it yielded wild grapes.

And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem  
and people of Judah,  
judge between me  
and my vineyard.  
What more was there to do for my vineyard  
that I have not done in it?  
When I expected it to yield grapes,  
why did it yield wild grapes?  
And now I will tell you  
what I will do to my vineyard.  
I will remove its hedge,  
and it shall be devoured;  
I will break down its wall,  
and it shall be trampled down.  
I will make it a waste;  
it shall not be pruned or hoed,  
and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns;  
I will also command the clouds  
that they rain no rain upon it.  
For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts  
is the house of Israel,  
and the people of Judah  
are his pleasant planting;  
he expected justice,  
but saw bloodshed;  
righteousness,  
but heard a cry!

## **The Response**

### **Psalm 80:1-2, 8-18**

#### *Qui regis Israel*

- 1 **H**ear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock; \*  
shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.
- 2 In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, \*  
stir up your strength and come to help us.
- 8 You have brought a vine out of Egypt; \*  
you cast out the nations and planted it.
- 9 You prepared the ground for it; \*  
it took root and filled the land.
- 10 The mountains were covered by its shadow \*  
and the towering cedar trees by its boughs.

- 11 You stretched out its tendrils to the Sea \*  
and its branches to the River.
- 12 Why have you broken down its wall, \*  
so that all who pass by pluck off its grapes?
- 13 The wild boar of the forest has ravaged it, \*  
and the beasts of the field have grazed upon it.
- 14 Turn now, O God of hosts, look down from heaven;  
behold and tend this vine; \*  
preserve what your right hand has planted.
- 15 They burn it with fire like rubbish; \*  
at the rebuke of your countenance let them perish.
- 16 Let your hand be upon the man of your right hand, \*  
the son of man you have made so strong for yourself.
- 17 And so will we never turn away from you; \*  
give us life, that we may call upon your Name.
- 18 Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; \*  
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

## **The Epistle**

### **Hebrews 11:29-12:2**

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets-- who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented-- of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

## **The Gospel**

## **Luke 12:49-56**

Jesus said, "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided:

father against son  
and son against father,  
mother against daughter  
and daughter against mother,  
mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law  
and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"