

'Hear and Listen' : Isaiah 1:10-20, Hebrews 11: 8-16, Luke 12: 32-40

The theme that emerges from our lectionary readings is focused on living 'the right way in our God relationship' or to put it another way: 'what is required' for a pure God relationship.

The reading from Isaiah takes us once more into the world of the Hebrew people and their ongoing endeavours to live the right way with their God relationship whilst the Lucan reading is instruction on living the right way as the people seek to express their faith in the days of the early church. Then, Hebrews reveals to us examples of those who have done just that - lived as God desires.

Isaiah's vision came to him in the early years of his ministry as a Prophet of God. It is about 742BC - before exile in Babylon and elsewhere. We can say the vision's focus is "Hear and Listen"; its subtext: Worship. This vision regarding worship may be broken into two parts: 1 what God is **not** happy with and 2 what God is happy with. If they will 'hear and listen', a worship that is pleasing to God will be revealed to them and it will be a worship God requires rather than what they want.

In the first part the Hebrew people hear that God is not happy with their worship life. God has had enough of sacrifices and burnt offerings. God is rejecting - not their worship - but a ritual that has become empty of meaning. It would seem that this sacrificial system had come to be understood as a means of attempting to manipulate God for their personal purposes. The notion of worship being God centred was falling by the wayside as the people took from God what they wanted rather than what it was God may be requiring from them. Their notion of worship was not the right way. One cannot bargain with God by performing empty rituals or making empty promises.

After setting out, the wrong way: the second part deals with what would make God happy; what God requires. 'Hear and Listen' to a worship that is God centred. The right Worship is an honouring of God. Burnt offerings and sacrifices mean nothing unless the worshiper seeks to live a daily life of goodness and justice. Worship is an idle exercise unless it brings about a changed heart within the

worshipper. God is saying don't even bother unless there is goodness and justice accompanying the offering. A later Prophet Micah expresses it thus: **Micah 6:8:** "God has shown you what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?" An ongoing daily exercise!

What is extremely encouraging is no matter how the people strayed in their God relationship; no matter how they allowed the right way to be muddied, the right way to get trampled into the ground, God kept them within God's embrace and would bring them back and reveal to them once more, through the teaching of the true prophets what was required. 'Hear and listen' ... 'come, let us reason together'... an invitation as relevant today as then.

The people are called by God to make a decision about their God relationship. "Come now, let us reason together, Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but - if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." The choice is theirs; the choice is ours.

The Lucan reading is an invitation to choose as well. This call to decision is based on the good news of the Kingdom, Reign of God that Jesus of Nazareth preached. Through his work on the cross, the core of the Christian faith, his death and resurrection, we have the Truth that God rules and offers people a share in this reign.

The call is for us to 'hear, listen and understand the right way' and choose. In this instruction from Luke, what God desires for his disciples leads to a discussion on lifestyle. For Luke, Jesus teaching is a warning about being preoccupied with possessions and placing one's security in abundance of possessions. **Certainly something we of the 21st century can also identify with.** In the previous verses of this instruction on living God's way, Jesus tells a parable about a rich man who had an exceptionally good harvest which will provide security for years to come. His worry is 'how to store it'. He

solves it by building bigger storage barns. When this was done, sure in the knowledge that his wealth has guaranteed ease and comfort for years to come, he said to himself: Oh, you lucky man. However, his absorption in the storage problem has masked from him the fact that wealth provides no security. He forgets the possibility that life may be short or that other things can happen to destroy the wealth and the life planned.

So the sting in the tale of this parable: God said 'You fool. The very night you will have to give up your life; then who will get all these things you have kept for yourself.' This parable initiates a theme that becomes very prominent in the writings of Luke from now on. Nothing is more destructive of life and humanity than an excessive preoccupation with acquiring, holding on to and increasing wealth. The problem is not so much the possession of the riches but the desire to acquire and enhance. In the feeding of insecurity, people are prevented from attending to the relationship with God that brings the only security that counts. Hear it again, in the feeding of our insecurities, we are prevented from attending to the relationship that brings the only security that counts: our relationship with God. We lose the right way with our worry, our anxieties, our insecurities.

The Gospel comes in with "don't worry about anything" - don't go storing up treasures for yourself which will fade away. But rather allow God to take care of you. Don't hold on tightly to what you have. We cannot deny that we become anxious, we fret and stress. But the gospel is saying to us: "Don't become so excessively anxious and worried that you lose sight of what really counts: your relationship with God and God's right way for you." Set your heart on the treasure that is to come; not here on earth where rust and moth, the downturn in the stock market can destroy it. Happiness is not to be found 'in the keeping here on earth' but 'in the keeping of a right God relationship'. Live the best you can and allow God, who knows all you have and all you need, to be concerned for you." Live right with God and God will be there with you.

Unlike the rich man who trusted only himself and acted only in his own self interest, the people of God are invited to trust God and to

take to heart God's love and concern. When we think about this, we know that what we believe about the future and our destiny, affects how we live in the present, how we live in the now. So then, as the final parable in our reading reminds us: Be watchful and faithful - and not in obsessive self concern with the things that in the end do not count.

This is the message of Hebrew 11 ... the entrusting of one's life and future to God is the reality of things hoped for, the proof of things not seen. 'For those who trust in God's reign, God is not ashamed to be called their God'.

I was pondering this. The Giants of the Faith do not come to a halt with Abraham, Sarah, Moses. We can move to the disciples, Peter, Paul and also think of contemporary Christians who have chosen to follow God's desires and entrust their life and times to God. I thought of John and Charles Wesley, David Livingstone, Albert Schweitzer, Gladys Aylward, Peter Marshall, Frances Ridley Havergal, Corrie Ten Boom, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Junior, Jim Elliott, Nate Young. The list goes on even up to today and I am sure you could add others to these examples of those 'who have risked all' choosing to follow what God desires; living the right way; their worship, a daily life of honouring of God; a trusting of God with all their life - worries, anxieties and concerns.

Worship is daily life: worship is not a Sunday activity only. Our life is to be lived in worship of God; to be lived in honouring God 24/7 in thoughts, words and deeds as we imitate the life of Christ through the power and the sustenance of the Holy Spirit. If that is not in our thinking, then we really need to get down and think through what we consider our Christian walk, our Christian life. Strive to become aware of what God desires for us : individually and collectively.

I want us to now come full circle now and embrace last week's sermon on prayer. For us to know God's way for our lives and for us to hand over to God for our security is not easy and we need to be in prayer. Jesus sought to live as God desired by **praying regularly**. He is our example. For him, prayer was not an option or a muttering

in an emergency. It was a necessity. the breath of the soul. **He prayed Sensibly and confidently** placing his life in God's context: not my will but yours be done. And he heard and listened to the voice of God and trusted.

Can we allow ourselves to place our lives trustingly into the hands of God. Can we let go and let God. Can we let God be God. Let's try together.