

**Comments****Eighth Sunday after Epiphany** February 27, 2022

*These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; others may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.* © Chris Haslam

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**Isaiah 55:10-13**

NRSV

This chapter concludes a section of the book called *Second Isaiah* by many scholars. It was written during the Exile, after the fall of Babylon to the Persians. This section began with Chapter 40, and key themes presented there are repeated here: the way of the Lord, calling the people to enjoy God's gifts, a new deliverance, the word of the Lord, the king, heaven and earth, God's relationship with Israel, forgiveness, and the participation of other nations.

Vv. 1-3 invite all *who thirst* for God (even the impoverished) to join in his freely-given banquet at the end of time. The meal symbolizes God's love, his abundance. Recall other banquets: (1) in Egypt, after a plague killed every first-born son but *passed over* (did not afflict) Israelite sons; and (2) after Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai. Here the banquet is for "everyone". The food is both invaluable ("without price") and cannot be bought ("without money"). God made an "everlasting covenant" (v. 3) with David, making him a great leader and guaranteeing him an enduring line of successors; now this greatness is transferred to Israel ("you"), so that they "may live", i.e. see the promises of long ago fulfilled now and in the future. Now nations who neither know Israel nor are known to her will come seeking Israel's "LORD" (v. 5). All may now "seek the LORD" (v. 6), turn humbly to him, not only in the Temple but wherever he may be found, for "he is near". The invitation to share in the life of this new community is even extended to evildoers who repent and "return to the Lord" (v. 7), for they will be pardoned. God may be "near" but he is transcendent, sufficiently removed not to be contaminated by human sin. His ways are beyond human comprehension (vv. 8-9). Vv. 10-11 say that God's *word* comes gently from him, to permeate the earth and return to him, mission done. His spirit, infused in humans, brings in them godliness, success in furthering God's plan. Vv. 12-13 say that sin will be abolished; all the world will recognize God; creation will be renewed, and all will rejoice. This will be an "everlasting sign" of God's love

**Psalms 92:1-4,11-14**

NRSV

This is a psalm of thanksgiving in which an individual contrasts the fate of those who trust in God with those who do not. He begins by rejoicing in morning and evening worship which is accompanied by musical instruments. In vv. 5-11 he contrasts his experience with the fate of those who shun God's ways: they are dull-witted and "stupid" (v. 6), but he is perceptive; they "sprout like grass" (v. 7), but "are doomed", i.e. have no access to God; God has made him strong and powerful ("my horn", v. 10, a symbol of strength and power); he has seen "the downfall" (v. 11) of his enemies. The "righteous" are rewarded: they are prosperous ("flourish", v. 12) and are still in good health "in old age" (v. 14). This shows that

God is just and dependable ("my rock", v. 15).

**1 Corinthians 15:51-58**

NRSV

Paul has written that neither the living nor those who have died can take part in the kingdom of God as they are. "We will not all die" but "we all will be changed", we will all have new spiritual bodies. The "mystery" (v. 51) is a secret truth, (revealed to and through Paul), about what will happen at the End, at the "trumpet" call expected to accompany it. Those who had died had perishable (decaying) bodies. Becoming immortal, they will no longer be subject to the power of death. (Some translations have *corruptible* for "perishable" (vv. 50-54) and *incorruptible* for "imperishable". While alive, we do tend to sin, so we are corruptible.) Being then immortal, the prophecy that "'Death has been swallowed up in victory'" (v. 54, perhaps Paul's rendering of Isaiah 25:8) will be fulfilled. Note "we" in v. 52: Paul expects to still be alive when the End comes. The "sting" (v. 55) is that of the serpent. Sin has been overcome by Christ's death on the Cross, so can no longer harm Christians. God gives us the "victory" (v. 57) over sin, and hereafter over death.

Paul ends by encouraging his "beloved" (v. 58) to be "steadfast", not being shaken by false teaching ("immovable"), doing their very best in spreading the good news, because Christ has already won "the victory" (v. 57) for us. So being Christians ("in the Lord", v. 58) they know that their "labour is not in vain".

**Luke 6:39-49**

NRSV

This reading is like the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, but with a different audience, and different intent. Jesus is speaking to a "great crowd" of his followers and a "multitude" of people some of whom have travelled far to hear him. They include both Jews and Gentiles.

Jesus' preaching has a distinctly Christian flavour, for example "love your enemies ..." in v. 35. In v. 39 "a blind person" is one whose eyes are yet to be opened by Jesus' teaching. In v. 40, "disciple" means *learner*, about the faith. Vv. 41-42 indulge in hyperbole: focus on your major failures ("log") rather than quibbling about minor failures ("speck") in others. The Greek word translated as "hypocrite" (v. 42) originally meant *actor*; here it may mean one who is pitifully deceived about his own condition.

In vv. 43-45 Jesus says that the surest way of knowing the inner condition of a person is their outward manner of life, what they say, but just calling Jesus Lord is insufficient: obey his instructions; build your lives on effective implementation of his teachings. Act on them! (v. 47)

Vv. 48-49 are also in Matthew 7:24-27, part of the Sermon on the Mount. There the hearers are Palestinian, so this parable would make sense: the bedrock is close to the surface in Palestine so building a solid foundation was possible, and sensible, so the Spring and Autumn rains would not carry away the house. But here in Luke, many hearers were from elsewhere, places where the overburden is much thicker and/or rain is a rarity.