

Sermon Sunday 20th March 2022

Isaiah 55: 1-9, Luke 13: 1-9

The Book of Isaiah is a compilation of 3 authors works written in different periods. Scholars think as they were written in similar styles, they were placed together in what we now call the Book of Isaiah.

Chapter 55 is the last chapter of the second section of the Book of Isaiah which sums up many of the themes and concerns from chapters 40 to 55.

So, what do we have in chapter 55 and what is at the heart of it? At the heart of it is a picture of Gods extravagant invitation to the banquet, Gods banquet not mans and at no cost in human monetary terms. Look at what Isaiah says 'COME, ALL YOU ARE THIRSTY; YOU WHO HAVE NO MONEY COME BUY AND EAT;' This invitation from God is for everyone who believes in God; however, there is a cost. That cost is to change our lives and turn to God.

VERSE 6 'SEEK THE LORD WHILE HE MAY BE FOUND, CALL ON HIM WHILE HE IS NEAR.' This I think relates to God's time, which we humans do not know. We know He will return to the earth, so

Isaiah's words to seek the Lord while He may be found are telling us that we must seek God now and commit to Him because when He returns to earth it will be too late, as we are told throughout the Bible about the Day of Judgement when some will be saved and some cast into the fire.

In verses 8 and 9 God is telling the Israelites, who we know strayed from Him many, many times, that His time and His thoughts are His and not known to humans. God does not plan to move away from us, as He did not with the Israelites so many times, it is us who move away from God or place barriers between us and God. However, we know God forgives those who truly repent, to quote from the Prayer of Confession, but we must seek God now, while we are able to and before it is too late. This is the message from Isaiah who invites us to God's banquet, a banquet for all who believe and turn to God before it is too late and something Isaiah tells us, we are unable to buy with money, unlike the secular, commercial world we live in today.

On first reading the Gospel from Luke appears to be very different from Isaiah's reading, but they aren't.

Jesus' words in verses 1 to 5 are at first reading very harsh when referring to the deaths of the rebel Galileans and the deaths of the people who died when the tower at Siloam collapsed, which is believed to have housed workers building a Roman aqueduct. The rebels were killed because Pilate thought they were rebelling against Rome and the workers were killed because they worked for the Romans. Neither groups would have been supported by the Pharisees who thought working for or rebellion against the Romans was wrong only because it would lessen their control of the Jews and their own privileged lives. It is a trick question put to Jesus in verse 1. Jesus does not fall for this and instead of blaming others i.e., the Romans or working for them everyone should look to their own lives. Verse 5 **'I TELL YOU, NO. BUT UNLESS YOU REPENT, YOU TO WILL ALL PERISH.'** Jesus is referring here not only to individuals but to Israel and its Jewish leaders to change their ways and repent before it is too late, a theme picked up in Isaiah.

The parable about the vine tree on first reading again is strange, but it is not. In the Bible there are many references to fruitful trees used as symbol of godly

living. Psalm 1 verse 3 **'HE IS LIKE A TREE PLANTED BY STREAMS OF WATER, WHICH YIELDS ITS FRUIT, IN SEASON AND WHOSE LEAF DOES NOT WITHER.'** JEREMIAH 17 **VERSES 7 AND 8. 'BUT BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO TRUSTS IN THE LORD WHOSE CONFIDENCE IS IN HIM. HE WILL BE LIKE A TREE PLANTED BY THE WATER THAT SENDS OUT ITS ROOTS BY THE STREAM. IT DOES NOT FEAR WHEN HEAT COMES; ITS LEAVES ARE ALWAYS GREEN, DOES NOT FEAR DROUGHT AND NEVER FAILS TO BEAR FRUIT.'**

Jesus is saying that the fig tree which took up gardening time and valuable earth and did not bear fruit unlike the vines should be taken up and destroyed. Jesus is warning His listeners and us that God will not tolerate for ever their lack of productivity like the barren fig tree. To receive God's special treatment, we must give in return rather like the gardener in the parable who would nurture and grow the barren fig tree. The gardener is God who here is offering the listeners and us the opportunity to repent and grow in His love.

However, the meaning and warning in this reading and the Isaiah reading is the same; we must repent and give our lives to God and the teachings of His Son Jesus Christ and join the banquet and produce good fruit in our lives for God's work here on earth, before it is too late.

Let us pray.

Lord, you have given us time to repent and change our lives. Help us to see how we should change our lives, our thinking and to walk in your loving way.

Amen