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It may come as a surprising thought that the ‘blessings’ we receive and enjoy have the potential to make us less Christ-like, but, depending on how we understand God’s promises and the goodness God gives, this can be the case. When we view wealth, success or power as unquestionable signs of God’s blessing, we are in danger of departing from the Gospel’s call to align ourselves with the least, and to find God’s blessing in community and sharing. This is the challenge of the readings this week in the Revised Common Lectionary.

May your worship this week lead you into a new sense of connectedness with others, and a new generosity in sharing the grace and mercy of God.

## **INTRODUCTIONS**

*For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines*

**Isaiah 1:1, 10-20**: Isaiah prophesies against God’s people, expressing God’s displeasure at their worship and sacrifices while injustice remains among them. God invites the people to repent and confess, and if they do, God promises to cleanse and restore them. OR **Genesis 15:1-6**: God promises that Abram will have descendants as numerous as the stars. Abram’s faith in this

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promise is considered to be the basis for his relationship with God (or is counted as righteousness).

**Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23**: God comes in judgement on God's people, inviting them to offer genuine sacrifices of thanksgiving, and promising God's salvation if they will do this.

OR **Psalm 33:12-22**: Strength, military might, magnificent horses cannot save people. Only waiting on God and trusting in God's mercy is a safe refuge.

**Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16**: Abraham is an example of faith, giving up his homeland and living as a foreigner in a strange land for the sake of a God-given inheritance.

**Luke 12:32-40**: Jesus promises God's kingdom to those who follow Christ, inviting them to give up temporary, material security and wealth for heavenly security and riches. He encourages them to stay awake and be aware of God's coming.

Readings at:

[http://bible.oremus.org/?show\\_adj=no&passages=Isaiah%201:%201,%2010-20%0Acw%20Psalm%2050:%201-8,%2023-24%0AHebrews%2011:%201-3,8-16%0ALuke%2012:%2032-40](http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Isaiah%201:%201,%2010-20%0Acw%20Psalm%2050:%201-8,%2023-24%0AHebrews%2011:%201-3,8-16%0ALuke%2012:%2032-40)

### **LECTIONARY NOTES**

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

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

Like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, we are inherently a people of sin. Sinful in what we do and sinful in how we worship no matter how hard we try. We can ask ourselves, "Is our worship acceptable to God?" When we experience God's grace we can't continue to mistreat each other or ignore injustices. Religion itself does not put us in His good grace. Grace isn't cheap nor is it easy,

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and it's not something we get for just sitting in a pew. It's time for us to look deep into our hearts and know the truth.

- How can you help the oppressed?
- In what ways can you be more obedient to God?
- What is your heart telling you?

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

This Psalm talks about the relationship we have with God as we struggle with the significance of our worship. We all struggle whether we realize it or not. We often just go through the motions of prayer and praise, sometimes just on Sundays. Read Psalm 50 as a way to give thanks to our Lord and find a way to move closer to God.

- In what ways can you deepen your worship?
- What is your relationship to God?
- Why are personal sacrifices of importance?

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

We can be assured of the faith we have for the abilities God gives us. Faith is real and it moves us forward even in the uncertain times of today. Our faith is not simply hoping for something, faith is real. Although it cannot be seen, faith is there. All we need is faith. Hold fast, obey God's commands, and believe that God is always there for you.

- What are some examples of having faith in God?
- Can we improve our commitment to God?
- How has faith helped you in your life?

### **Luke 12:32-40**

Faith frees us to give so don't stock up on material possessions for yourself. We can forget ourselves through giving. We give money at

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church to make us more generous not poorer. God's blessings are promised for those who are ready and judgment for those who aren't. Being ready means living as we are taught and doing it daily without fear. Give and be generous. This will prepare us for God's kingdom.

- Where your treasure is your heart will be, what is your treasure?
- Could you live without your possessions?
- How could you be more generous?

## **SERMON**

### **Transforming Our Vision**

**[RCL: Isaiah 1:1, 10-20; Psalm 50:1-8, 23-24; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40](#)**

In June 2010, Bill Gates and Warren Buffett announced a new charity initiative for billionaires: the Giving Pledge. So far, Gates and Buffett have received pledges from 137 billionaires from around the world who have pledged to donate at least half of their fortunes to charity. Five years in, a total of 365 billion dollars has been pledged.

365 billion dollars is a lot of money, so much that it's hard to conceptualize. It's more than the total cost of damage from Hurricane Katrina, at 108 billion dollars; but far less than the total cost of The War on Terror since 2001, estimated at 1.7 trillion dollars. The total US budget for 2015 amounted to 3.7 trillion dollars —or about 10 times the amount this group of billionaires was able to pledge, for just one year. 365 billion wouldn't even cover the amount our government spends annually on discretionary items, like education, transportation, and the National Parks.

Of course, 365 billion dollars will make a difference in the lives of many people. This money will filter through charitable organizations and eventually work its way down to people on the ground, people who are hungry and need a meal, or homeless and need a place to sleep, or sick and need help paying for medical care. But 365 billion

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dollars isn't enough to fundamentally change the persistent patterns of need in the world.

Robert Reich, former Secretary of Labor, reflecting on the charity initiative in his blog, thinks that this demonstrates that America has entered another gilded age, similar to the end of the 19th century, when “robber barons [like the Vanderbilts, Carnegies, and Rockefellers] lorded over the economy and almost everyone else lost ground.” The robber barons of the past, like the tech billionaires of today, could afford to give away huge chunks of their fortune and still maintain their relative position and power. The gap between the rich and everyone else, after flattening out somewhat in the middle of the 20th century, continues to grow bigger and bigger, approaching what it was in that previous gilded age.

Now against charity, as Paul writes in the letter to the Galatians, there is no law. However, there is a difference between the popular idea of charity, and charity as a theological virtue. The theological virtue of charity that we are called to as Christians goes deeper than merely taking out our checkbooks and donating money to a good cause. Charity, or Caritas, is that selfless, unconditional, and voluntary lovingkindness we see in Jesus—it's the way Jesus loves us, and the way we are called to love others. Of course, it's easy to see how caritas could lead us to the modern kind of charity: one way we can behave with lovingkindness toward our neighbors is by giving them money to help them when they are in need.

But that is not where caritas ends. A Christian heart truly possessed of caritas begins to wonder, sooner or later, why the needs are so endless: why are there so many mouths to feed? Why are there so many people without a place to sleep? What are the conditions that create so much suffering in the world, and can we do anything to change those conditions?

Such questions can be dangerous. As Roman Catholic Bishop Dom Camara of Brazil once said: “When I gave food to the poor, they called me a saint; when I asked why there were so many poor, they called me a communist.” Communist is a dirty word, of course, because as a political and economic system, we know that it

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doesn't work. Capitalism does better in some ways, but without protections can run roughshod over the poor and weak.

In the end, the hope of the poor will never be in a human political system—human systems always have a tendency toward corruption. No, the place we find hope, the place we are called to live into, to build up, as we listen for and respond to the cries of the poor, can only be the Kingdom of God.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus says to his followers: “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.”

Jesus’ central message during his life on earth was this: that the Kingdom of God is at hand. It’s coming. It’s near. And Jesus’ hope was that God’s Kingdom would transform life on earth, in the here and now, bringing God’s reign of justice and peace into the everyday lives of the poor people he lived among. In the prayer Jesus taught, we ask “your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.” It’s the earth that needs transformation into the way of God’s Kingdom.

The same concerns are echoed in the reading from Isaiah. In the very first verses, Isaiah accuses the leaders of Judah: “Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!”

Sodom and Gomorrah were evil places, but not for the reasons you might have heard. According to the prophet Ezekiel, Sodom’s sin was not about sexual violence. Rather, in Ezekiel’s words: “This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.” If that’s the definition of Sodomy—that they had plenty of food for themselves, but didn’t share it with those in need—then who are the Sodomites of our day?

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Isaiah accuses the rulers and elite in Jerusalem of behaving like the people of Sodom. They don't try to "rescue the oppressed," they don't "defend the orphan" or "plead for the widow." They try to win God's favor by making all the proper sacrifices in the temple, but it doesn't matter. The only way to please God is to seek justice for the poor.

Justice is at the heart of Jesus' message about the Kingdom of God. In God's kingdom, there will be no suffering, and the resources God has given us will be shared equitably so that everyone has enough. As citizens of God's kingdom, we live under the charity, the *caritas* of God. And as we imitate God's loving-kindness toward us, as we are charitable toward others, our *caritas* must lead us inevitably towards justice. When we give to the poor, we move closer to them. When we serve them, we are able to listen to them. And in their cry, we hear God's voice—and God's voice cannot help but change us, transforming our vision of what the world ought to be, and inspiring us to strive for the justice of God's kingdom.

Amen.

## **COLLECTS OF THE DAY**

### **Collect One**

O God,  
whose never-failing providence ordereth all things  
both in heaven and earth;  
We humbly beseech thee to put away from us  
all hurtful things,  
and to give us those things which be profitable for us;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Collect Two**

Blessed are you, O Lord,  
and blessed are those who observe and keep your law:

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Help us to seek you with our whole heart,  
to delight in your commandments  
and to walk in the glorious liberty  
given us by your Son, Jesus Christ.

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Presider or deacon

Let us offer prayers to God, who knows the needs of every living creature.

Deacon or other leader

For N our bishop and N

our presbyter, for this holy gathering, and for the people of God in every place.

Lord, have mercy.

For the leaders of the nations, and for mercy, justice, and peace in the world.

Lord, have mercy.

For farmers and a good harvest, for travelers and those on vacation, and for safety from violent storms.

Lord, have mercy.

For all those in danger and need: the sick and the suffering, prisoners, captives, and their families, the hungry, homeless, and oppressed.

Lord, have mercy.

For the dying and the dead.

Lord, have mercy.

For ourselves, our families and companions, and all those we love.

Lord, have mercy.



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Lifting our voices with all creation, with Saint \_\_\_\_\_ and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. To you, O Lord.

Presider

All-knowing God, God of Wisdom, hear our prayers for all whose days are full of pain and give us rest from toil; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### POST COMMUNION

Strengthen for service, Lord,  
the hands that holy things have taken;  
may the ears which have heard your word  
be deaf to clamour and dispute;  
may the tongues which have sung your praise be free from deceit;  
may the eyes which have seen the tokens of your love  
shine with the light of hope;  
and may the bodies which have been fed with your body  
be refreshed with the fulness of your life;  
glory to you for ever.

### PRAYERS

Enable this church to do your will  
Make it vulnerable that it may speak with calm humility;  
Make it outward looking that it may care deeply  
Make it a community of peacemakers and bridge builders  
In the midst of turbulence let the church make space  
for the hearing of your still small voice. (*Delia Shephard*)

Eternal God, in Christ you make yourself our guest. Amid all our cares and concerns make us attentive to your voice and alert to your presence, that we may prize your word above all else; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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O God, you are the light of the minds that know you, the life of the souls that love you, and the strength of the wills that serve you; help us so to know you that we may truly love you, so to love you that we may fully serve you, whom to serve is perfect freedom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. — *Augustine of Hippo (354-430)*

Knit my soul to your own, O Christ, so that I may never be separated from you. Only in you am I a person fully alive. Only in your light can I see and only in your strength can I pursue my way. To you I come, O wisdom without end. In you I rest, O mercy without limit. To you I give all praise, O crown of all majesty.  
Amen      *Mechtild of Magdeburg, 1210-80*

Wonderful are you, God of creation, without whom nothing draws breath.

Wonderful are you, Christ Jesus, without whom our world stays in the dark.

Wonderful are you, Spirit-Friend, without whom our worship remains formal.

We trust you, we love you, we yearn for more of you;  
we praise you for your holiness, beauty and inexhaustible love.  
Amen!

God of Abraham and Jesus, you invite your people to contemplate heavenly things and urge us toward faith in you. May your coming among us find our doors open, our tables set, and all your people ready to greet you. Amen.

Wonderful are you, God of creation, without whom nothing draws breath.

Wonderful are you, Christ Jesus, without whom our world stays in the dark.

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We trust you, we love you, we yearn for more of you;  
we praise you for your holiness, beauty and inexhaustible love.  
Amen!

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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.

Forgive us for the narrowness of vision which sees only the clouds and misses the rainbow. *Women of Guatemala, 1993*

May the presence of Christ be seen in his people - bringing peace to the confused and friendship to the lonely. May his love give us courage to be his presence in the world. *Rev Ian White, Chair of the Channel Islands District*

Loving God, breath into our hearts and minds at this time your loving and guiding word. Inspire us by your Spirit, that we may hear, and later do, what you would have us hear and do. Lift us up by your still small voice within and grant us the blessing we need and we seek. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen *Richard Baxter, 1615-91*

One God, awesome in creative energy and power, all embracing in love and grace; you have expressed yourself in Jesus Christ, revealing what is the length and breadth, the height and depth of your divine compassion and care for all creation. Help us, through being open to your Spirit's energising power, to respond with thankfulness: to go about our daily lives as though they were an expression and offering of our thankfulness; and so enable us to reveal that same love and grace, compassion and care to all with whom we share our hours and our days.

## HYMN SUGGESTIONS

### (c) 1st Reading Isaiah 1: 1, 10–20

357 I'll praise my maker while I've breath

553\* Jesu, lover of my soul

587\* Just as I am, without one plea

446\* Strengthen for service, Lord, the hands

498 What does the Lord require for praise and offering?

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### **(c) Psalm Psalm 50: 1–8, 23–24**

501 Christ is the world's true light  
381\* God has spoken – by his prophets  
97\* Jesus shall reign where'er the sun  
131 Lift up your heads, you mighty gates  
362\* O God beyond all praising  
140 [The Lord will come and not be slow]

### **(p) 1st Reading Genesis 15: 1–6**

10\* All my hope on God is founded  
501 Christ is the world's true light  
383\* Lord, be thy word my rule  
595\* Safe in the shadow of the Lord  
545\* Sing of Eve and sing of Adam  
323\* The God of Abraham praise

### **(p) Psalm Psalm 33: 12–22**

81\* Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided  
539 Rejoice, O land, in God thy might

### **2nd Reading Hebrews 11: 1–3, 8–16**

Ms\* A city strong we claim as ours  
326\* Blessèd city, heavenly Salem  
\* (Christ is made the sure foundation)  
461\* For all thy saints, O Lord  
646\* Glorious things of thee are spoken  
469 In our day of thanksgiving one psalm let us offer  
670\* Jerusalem the golden  
672\* Light's abode, celestial Salem  
658\* One more step along the world I go  
681\* There is a land of pure delight  
661\* Through the night of doubt and sorrow

### **The Gospel Luke 12: 32–40**

643\* Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart  
261 Christ, above all glory seated!  
86 Christ is the King! O friends, rejoice  
570\* Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning

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363\* O Lord of earth and heaven and sea

142 [Wake, O wake with tidings thrilling]

145\* You servants of the Lord

## **AN INVITATION**

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