

INTRODUCTIONS

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.

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

Psalms 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 **Psalms 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%20Psalms%2050:%201-8,%2023-24%0AHebrews%2011:%201-3,8-16%0ALuke%2012:%2032-40

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

O God,
who declarest thy almighty power
most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity;
Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace,
that we, running the way of thy commandments,
may obtain thy gracious promises,
and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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Collect Two

O God,
you declare your almighty power
most chiefly in showing mercy and pity:
Mercifully grant to us such a measure of your grace,
that we, running the way of your commandments,
may receive your gracious promises,
and be made partakers of your heavenly treasure;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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.

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

Lord of all mercy,

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we your faithful people have celebrated
the memorial of that single sacrifice
which takes away our sins and brings pardon and peace.
By our communion
keep us firm on the foundation of the gospel
and preserve us from all sin;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God of our pilgrimage, you have willed that the gate of mercy should stand open for those who trust in you: look upon us with your favour that we who follow the path of your will may never wander from the way of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYERS

God of justice,
your word is light and truth.
Let your face shine on us to restore us,
that we may walk in your way,
seeking justice and doing good. Amen.

Friends in Christ,
God invites us to hold the needs of our sisters and brothers
as dear to us as our own needs.
Loving our neighbors as ourselves,
we offer our thanksgivings and our petitions
on behalf of the church and the world.
Hear our prayers, God of power,
and through the ministry of your Son
free us from the grip of the tomb,
that we may desire you as the fullness of life
and proclaim your saving deeds to all the world. Amen.

As you heard the prayer of Isaac and Rebekah, O God,
and guided them in the way of your love,
so listen now to those who call upon you.
Move us to praise your gracious will,
for in Christ Jesus you have saved us from the deeds of death
and opened for us the hidden ways of your love.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lord God, friend of those in need,
your Son Jesus has untied our burdens
and healed our spirits.
We lift up the prayers of our hearts for those still burdened,
those seeking healing,
those in need within the church and the world.
Hear our prayers
that we may love you with our whole being
and willingly share the concerns of our neighbors. Amen.

Creator God,
you call us to love and serve you

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with body, mind, and spirit
through loving your creation
and our sisters and brothers.
Open our hearts in compassion
and receive these petitions
on behalf of the needs of the church and the world.

Holy One,
hear our prayers and make us faithful stewards
of the fragile bounty of this earth
so that we may be entrusted with the riches of heaven. Amen.
We praise your abiding guidance, O God,
for you sent us Jesus, our Teacher and Messiah,
to model for us the way of love for the whole universe.
We offer these prayers of love
on behalf of ourselves and our neighbors,
on behalf of your creation and our fellow creatures.

Loving God,
open our ears to hear your word
and draw us closer to you,
that the whole world may be one with you
as you are one with us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
God of mercy and healing,
you who hear the cries of those in need,
receive these petitions of your people
that all who are troubled
may know peace, comfort, and courage.
Life-giving God,
heal our lives,
that we may acknowledge your wonderful deeds
and offer you thanks from generation to generation
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God of salvation,
who sent your Son to seek out and save what is lost,
hear our prayers
on behalf of those who are lost in our day,
receiving these petitions and thanksgivings
with your unending compassion.
Redeeming Sustainer,
visit your people
and pour out your strength and courage upon us,
that we may hurry to make you welcome
not only in our concern for others,
but by serving them
generously and faithfully in your name. Amen.

God of judgment and grace,
you ask not for sacrifices
but lives of trusting faith

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that acknowledge your power and mercy.
Give us faith as deep and strong as Abraham's and Sarah's,
that we may follow you through all our days
as did Jesus Christ our Saviour. 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.

Let your merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of your humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please you; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. *Common Worship*

Lord of heaven and earth, as Jesus taught his disciples to be persistent in prayer, give us patience and courage never to lose hope, but always to bring our prayers before you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. *Common Worship Shorter Collect.*

Living God, you have placed in the hearts of your children a longing for your Word and a hunger for your truth. Grant that, believing in the One who you have sent, we may know him to be the true bread of heaven, your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. *Methodist Worship*

O God, the protector of all who put their trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: increase and multiply upon us your mercy that with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; grant this, heavenly Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. *Methodist Worship*

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.

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

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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.
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!

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. *Rev Ward Jones*

LECTIONARY NOTES 1

Alert to the Good News

Genesis 15:1-6; Psalm 33:12-22; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40

It is easy enough, given modern affluence, to imagine that "it doesn't get any better than this." It's tempting, in our complacency, to judge that things will continue as they are. It is

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persuasive, in our despair, to conclude that the world is a closed system with no gifts yet to be given.

Against those ready seductions of affluence, complacency, or despair, the gospel news is that God can and does enact newness in the world. Indeed it is peculiarly God's work to make new when it is thought not possible. Gospel folk are alert to the newness from God that is always about to break in.

The gospel reading summons to readiness like a slave who alertly awaits the return of the master. Psalm 33 celebrates the world as God's world and invites us to "hope in God's steadfast love" (verse 18), to "wait for the Lord" (20). The index of "hoppers" in Hebrews 11 takes as its champion father Abraham. Three times in these verses it is "by faith" (8, 9, 11). In trust Abraham traveled, lived in a foreign land, and bore a son. The Genesis narrative fills out the details of Abraham the hopper.

"Sojourners" in the gospel refuse both complacency and despair. They commit to the subversive act of alert hope, not doubting that God "delivers" and "keeps alive in famine" (Psalm 33:19).

Walter Brueggemann

LECTIONARY NOTES 2

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20:

+ I like this passage. The text makes a lot of sense to me. If you read through Leviticus, the first many chapters are filled with detailed codes for sacrifices to God for the community of faith. In this text from Isaiah, God doesn't say through the prophet that the sacrifices are meaningless or wrong per se, just that they're worthless because they obviously are meaningless to the ones offering them to God - and because of that have become meaningless to God.

+ God says, literally here, "I have had enough!" Enough of your offerings that are not matched by your actions. Enough of your worship when you don't actually do what I say when it matters. Enough ritual and show of faith when you don't live your faith. You can't fool God - your words and rituals don't match your actions and your living.

+ God says, back to the basics. This is what you need to do: Wash yourselves clean. Stop doing evil. Do good instead, by seeking justice, looking out for the oppressed, protecting the orphan. That's it.

+ "The mouth of the Lord has spoken." I like that visual emphasis on 'mouth.' Straight from the source. (Of course, I also think of "the mouth of Sauron" in the extended version of the film Lord of the Rings: Return of the King, but I think Isaiah is going for a different picture :))

Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23:

+ For once I like what they leave out of this selection better than what they leave in. Do check out verses 9-21 - they seem to me to leave out some good verses and to make the first section of text sound abruptly chopped off when these verses are omitted.

+ "Our God comes and does not keep silence." That's comforting - God speaks. God speaks for God's people. Even when we don't want to hear God's words!

+ God as Judge. How do you picture God judging?

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+ "Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me." Again, like Isaiah's text, the people here seem to be doing a good job of following the law and custom to the letter. But still God is unsatisfied, because they are totally missing the deeper meanings.

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16:

- + This text from Hebrews is a favourite of many - in elementary school at church we had to pick a favorite passage to read in worship as part of my Sunday School class - this was the text I chose - the account of the faith of that "great cloud of witnesses."
- + "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." What do you believe in that you have not seen? Why, when we believe in so many unseen things, is it hard to do the same when it comes to faith in God, faith in God's goodness, faith in God's love?
- + Disappointingly, but not unsurprisingly, this faith account details only the faith of the men in these stories, all of which had women in roles in the Old Testament. Too bad! Sarah and Rachel and Leah and Rebekah and Miriam were all part of these stories of faith too - don't forget them!

Luke 12:32-40:

- + Always be prepared - a good summary of this text! But there's more in it than that.
- + Would it be common practice for a master to serve the slaves, even if the master was pleased with their diligence? Yet read verse 37 - the master is serving the slaves. Jesus is twisting roles around here!
- + "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." This well-known verse packs a punch if we don't trivialize it into a little proverb. Try reversing the order: Where your heart is, there will your treasure be also." It doesn't work that way correctly, or as well, does it? There's a reason why Jesus says what he does. We start by examining our life and asking, "what is it that we treasure, honestly?" That's where our heart is. So we must be careful what we call 'treasure.'
- + If it is the Son of Man who comes unexpectedly, like the thief, who plays master and who plays slaves? Interesting...

Beth Quick

LECTIONARY NOTES 3

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

Much is made of the promises of God in some circles, but little is said about the 'cost' of receiving God's promises. Essentially this cost arises because God's promises are always offered to the community, not just to the individual. And so, Abram is promised innumerable descendants, but must give up his homeland to live among foreigners (as the Hebrews readings explains). In Isaiah's prophecy, God's people can be cleansed and restored, but they must embrace justice and mercy. In the Psalms, God's salvation is offered to those who, like Abram, will trust in God's mercy. Finally, Jesus promises the Kingdom to his followers, but they have to release their faith in human or material resources, and commit to remaining always awake and aware to God's coming – which, if we read the verses following the set section, is strongly linked with how we view and treat others. A great 'hook' for this week is the phrase "descendants of Abram", for Abram's story is the model for the faith we are called to this week – a commitment to trust in God and a

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willingness to discover & share God's promises of grace and mercy in and with the "other", the foreigner, the ones who seek justice, the ones we are called to serve.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: There are so many ways that the idea of God's promises and blessings intersect with the realities of our world. When we embrace a view (as so many do) that God's blessings are given primarily to individuals, and that wealth, power and beauty are signs of God's blessing, we will inevitably begin to strive for these "manifestations of blessing" for ourselves. The result, all too often, is that we grow selfish, self-centred, uncommitted to justice, and may even view poverty or suffering as signs of God's judgement. When, however, we realise that God's blessings are always given to communities, and that they are to be shared with the least – that the reality is that we have never really known God's blessing unless it brings justice, mercy and provision to all, especially the poor and weak – our striving becomes sacrificial and generous. We begin to find our place among the "foreigners", the impoverished and the marginalised, and we discover the richness of God's reign within and among us as we share the blessings that come through us with all. How does this idea of "communal blessing" speak to the distribution of resources in our world? In what way can our commitment to receive God's blessing in this way guide us as we vote, as we participate in civil processes, as we contemplate and petition the meetings of the powerful in our government, in groups like the G8, the G20, and the BRICS member states, and in the United Nations?

LOCAL APPLICATION: In so many ways we have developed a spirituality that hoards blessings, and keeps God's promises to ourselves. Even the way we view salvation – as a personal escape from hell that requires no engagement with, or responsibility for, others, and that recognises no other possible avenues of grace – is a hoarding of God's goodness and mercy for ourselves. And so, even within the church, we too easily hoard material wealth, facilities, people and opportunities, allowing our brothers and sisters in other communities, or other parts of our cities, to go without, to struggle and to suffer. How might our view and practice of Church change if we began to recognise that God's blessings are given to be shared, that we are called to live "among the foreigners" and that it is here that God's promises are fulfilled? How differently might we live if we chose to be "descendants of Abram" trusting God's Kingdom promises whole-heartedly, and laying aside our usual human structures of security and comfort in order to recognise God's coming through the least, the 'other', the ones who cry for justice?

SERMON OUTLINE

Lk 12:32-40 Don't be afraid, little flock..

an extract from Jesus' **Sermon on the Plain** - with *a crowd of many thousands (v1)* with teaching similar to that in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus reassures them: *Do not fear, little flock...* They were indeed small in number compared to the world's masses, but they have something which the world/worldliness could never offer - security in the arms of their shepherd.

1. God's Pleasure:- *It is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom* - God's gracious gift to unworthy humanity! - to all who turn from their sin & trust in the Saviour! Amazing Grace!

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So much of the teaching of Jesus focussed on the Kingdom of God - freely offered to all who turn to Christ in faith and trust.

2. Man's Treasure:- which no one can steal & which will never perish - *unfailing treasure in heaven (33) where no thief comes near & no moth destroys*. Man has got to decide about true eternal values - passing material wealth or eternal spiritual treasure. Worldly wealth can deceive/destroy... cf Parable of the **Rich Fool** - *was not rich toward God (12.21)*. Xians are called, by contrast, to be *rich toward God* - *sell your possessions & give alms* - help the poor & needy. Your true wealth lies with God - *where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*.

a) Be dressed for action (35) - long robes tied with a girdle or belt - ready for service - with *your lamps lit* - (cf Parable of the **10 virgins**) - *be like those waiting for their Master to return from the wedding banquet* - don't know when he will come, but be ready anyway! cf expectancy of the Return of Christ!

b) Be blessed for ever - by God - *Blessed are those slaves (37) whom the master finds alert when he comes* - watching, waiting, working... So he reminds them & us:- *you also must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour (40)*.

By Norman Porteous

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

"When Trouble Comes," the Rev. Dr. Charles Reeb, Day 1
http://day1.org/2109-when_trouble_comes

"Wishful Thinking, Optimism and Hope," the Rev. Dr. Michael Foss, Day 1
http://day1.org/1055-wishful_thinking_optimism_and_hope

"Beyond material worth," the Rev. Ben E. Helmer, Sermons that Work, Episcopal Digital Network
<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2013/07/16/12-pentecost-proper-14-c-2013/>

CHILDREN

Worshiping with Children, Proper 14, Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown.
<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2013/07/year-c-proper-14-19th-sunday-in.html>

"Plans Are Worthless," On the Chancel Steps, children's resources by Frances Woodruff,
<https://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/2013/07/30/plans/>

"Where Is Your Heart?" Children's Sermon from Sermons4kids.com.
http://www.sermons4kids.com/treasure_heart.html

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

Now Thank We All our God
Trust And Obey
Christ From Whom All Blessings Flow
Save Me

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Take Up Your Cross

You Have Shown Us (YouTube video – song starts at 1:24)

Freely, Freely (God forgave my sin) (YouTube video)

God Of Justice (YouTube video)

Lifesong (YouTube video)