

**Opening Prayer**

**Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.**

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

<sup>1:1</sup> The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. <sup>10</sup> Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! <sup>11</sup> What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. <sup>12</sup> When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; <sup>13</sup> bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation-- I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. <sup>14</sup> Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. <sup>15</sup> When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. <sup>16</sup> Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, <sup>17</sup> learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. <sup>18</sup> Come now, let us argue it out, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. <sup>19</sup> If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; <sup>20</sup> but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

**Commentary**

In today's lection, Isaiah pours forth God's heart for just dealings among God's people. He addresses the principal players in Judah as rulers of Sodom and Gomorrah, implying that the whole lot of them would be no different from the devastating fate of other cities if they did not change their ways. What would make God pronounce this verdict on the impeccable performance for the very sacrificial system that had been ordained in the Torah? It was the fact that the Judahites acted as if sacrifices and rituals could serve as a substitute for a just and righteous society. No animal sacrifices or cultic acts could secure God's favor for the worshippers if those same people did not share God's heart for justice and refused to demonstrate compassion for the weak and defenseless. The prophet's intent was not to discredit the sacrificial system, but to align the worshippers' daily life and behavior with God's

standards and expectations. This theme (found also, for example, in Isaiah) became an important formative influence on the preaching of Jesus.

## **Reflection**

How has piety been a cloak or compensation for a lack of response to injustice or apathy toward the struggles of others in our lives?

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

<sup>11:1</sup> Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. <sup>2</sup> Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. <sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. <sup>11</sup> By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old--and Sarah herself was barren--because he considered him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup> Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore." <sup>13</sup> All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, <sup>14</sup> for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

## **Commentary**

The author argues that belief is seeing what is promised to be more certain than what can be seen in the present; but the visible creation offers proof that the unseen is more permanent and reliable than the seen. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Sarah are held up as shining examples of this kind of trust. Having been promised an inheritance by God, they voluntarily left all the respect, rootedness, and security they enjoyed in Chaldea and accepted the lower status of "strangers and foreigners." Their circumstances became a witness to the homeland God had prepared, as they were neither willing to return to their old comforts nor to settle down to a perfect existence in Canaan. Wandering like Bedouins (whose forerunners they were), they nevertheless enjoyed the honor of being personally related to God on account of their trust in and commitment to the unseen but real promised things of God. The example of their faith was offered as a challenge to those for whom the epistle was written, to embrace their new, lower status not as loss, but as part of faith's rite of passage, leading to an abiding home. The

essential tension expressed in Hebrews is between rootedness here, in this world's comfort and respect, and seeking to be rooted in the abiding realm of God.

## Reflection

Where are your roots in life? How does this affect your witness and walk with Christ?

## Luke 12:32-40

<sup>12:32</sup> "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup> 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. <sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. <sup>35</sup> "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; <sup>36</sup> be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. <sup>37</sup> Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. <sup>38</sup> If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. <sup>39</sup> "But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>40</sup> You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

## Commentary

In the first part of the lection, we find that only Luke gives specific instructions concerning how one is to lay up treasure in heaven – “sell your possessions, and give alms.” This nuance resonates with similar advice preserved by Luke through Jesus’ teachings on what it means to be a disciple, so that commitment to poverty and service can rightly be said to be a major emphasis in Luke-Acts. Investing in people who have real need—this, according to Luke, is the financial planning advice of Jesus and the early church.

## Reflection

The money we lay up for tomorrow can save a life, relieve a persecuted sister or brother, or bring healing to the sick today. How does this reality, and the mandate of the gospel, shape your financial planning objectives? What is, in your estimation, “real” need?

## Responsive Psalter

From Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23

<sup>50:1</sup> The mighty one, God the LORD,  
speaks and summons the earth  
from the rising of the sun to its setting.

<sup>2</sup> **Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,**

**God shines forth.**

<sup>3</sup> Our God comes and does not keep silence,  
before him is a devouring fire,  
and a mighty tempest all around him.

<sup>4</sup> **He calls to the heavens above  
and to the earth, that he may judge his people:**

<sup>5</sup> "Gather to me my faithful ones,  
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!"

<sup>6</sup> **The heavens declare his righteousness,  
for God himself is judge.**

<sup>7</sup> "Hear, O my people, and I will speak,  
O Israel, I will testify against you.  
I am God, your God.

<sup>8</sup> **Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;  
your burnt offerings are continually before me.**

<sup>22</sup> "Mark this, then, you who forget God,  
or I will tear you apart, and there will be no one to deliver.

<sup>23</sup> **Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me;  
to those who go the right way  
I will show the salvation of God."**

### **Closing Prayer**

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**