

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 3, 2022

Isaiah 66:10-14c

Psalm 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20

Galatians 6:14-18

Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

The Scripture readings this morning provide us with a plenitude of subjects to choose from, so we will begin our discussion with the reading from the 66th chapter of Isaiah. The chapter begins with the challenging words, “Thus says the Lord.” Whenever in the Bible we read the words, “Thus says the Lord,” it is imperative that we stop and pay attention.

It makes common sense that when God has something important to share we need to listen and respond. Often the message offers the answer we need to hear. But sometimes it reveals only the question we need to ask, while the answer is yet to come. Hence, we will discover the first reading from the Book of Isaiah to be a very intimate passage of Scripture where-in God’s love is compared with the ever-lasting love of a mother for her child.

The historical time period for this message from the prophet Isaiah starts the year King Uzziah died around 740 BC when Isaiah in a vision saw the Lord high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. The word train here means His robes. Hence, the King of king’s robes were magnificent. The word train can also mean might, as in a mighty army, or a mighty force, or sphere of influence.

No matter how you want to interpret the word train, for Isaiah, the vision of God’s majesty was so awesome and so overwhelming that

the nearby oppressive military powers invading Israel faded into insignificance.

Consequently, He spent his entire ministry calling God's people away from their self-centeredness and vain attempts to find temporal security back to trusting God's promises.

Furthermore, having observed the godless attitudes of the people, Isaiah was led by the Holy Spirit to insist on returning to a righteous standard of ethical behavior. Isaiah knew full well that God requires a sanctified lifestyle from those who wish to live in the presence of a holy God.

Is there any wondering that the name Isaiah means, "the Lord has saved;" in fact, some biblical scholars refer to the Book of Isaiah as the 5th Gospel because of its many references to Jesus and the often-mentioned subject of redemption.

Hence the basic message of Isaiah's prophetic words center on the long awaited Messiah, the one who would someday establish His reign of grace and peace for a united Israel in the city of Jerusalem. Here you may recall that the name Jerusalem means "City of Peace."

Unfortunately, during the time period of Isaiah - God's people were not following the Lord's commands. Hence the people of Israel were divided into two kingdoms Northern and Southern, and both kingdoms had fallen into serious moral and spiritual decline – indeed, a situation seriously grieving the heart of God, and we might add a situation that reminds us of our present day. Our nation is also

divided, and unfortunately the divide continues to grow with more and more people ignoring God's commandments.

Fortunately, even when disobedient, God still loves His children; however, Israel's preoccupation with ill-gotten prosperity and political power had taken its toll. The laws of the Lord were spurned for new and seemingly more exciting secular ideas, thus Israel rejected the peace of Yahweh to follow in the ways of neighboring pagan cultures.

Knowing that God is both merciful and just - Isaiah having witnessed the sins of the people and their impending captivity cried out for mercy, "Lord how long?" The answer came back from God, true enough - there would be a time of judgment, but one-day God's promises would be realized.

Thus chapter 66, the last chapter in the Book of Isaiah records God's future promise to Israel, "Thus says the Lord: Rejoice with Jerusalem, the city of peace, and be glad because of her. She will comfort you as a mother comforts her child . . . As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; in Jerusalem you shall find your comfort.

Thus God gave Isaiah supernatural insight deep into the future, and there he saw the long awaited Kingdom of God beginning to emerge, indeed a heavenly kingdom initiated by the suffering Messiah who would welcome whosoever will may come - including you and me.

Even though mankind deserves judgment, the prophet Isaiah continues to this day to assure the listener of God's love. In chapter 53 he wrote:

Surely He has borne our grief and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Is 53:4-6).

To fully appreciate the heart and the message of the prophet Isaiah, one must first appreciate the anticipation and faith of the small group of people who waited, and prayed, and longed to see this much-desired promise come to fruition. The lesson here is do not give up on God, continue to pray and trust that He will answer – and He will – even if we don't like the answer.

Subsequently in today's Gospel in Luke 10:1-9 we see the fulfillment of Israel's long awaited promise of a new Kingdom in the person of Jesus Christ. Nearly 800 years had passed since Isaiah saw and recorded his vision. 800 years, can you even try to imagine waiting 800 years to receive the answer or fulfillment of a promise?

Think about it, with today's technology 8 days seems like way too long to wait for a letter or package, and for some in our instant text-messaging world, 8 seconds seems like an eternity. But 800 years had passed and now God was at work in a little known region known as Samaria. In the grand schema of world events mankind was totally unaware of what was about to happen.

And so, with this ancient historical context in mind, we enter today's Gospel story just after Jesus had appointed seventy-two disciples to go out and practice doing His mission. After dividing them two by two He sent them into the villages of Samaria to proclaim with wonders and signs, "The kingdom of God is at hand for you."

As a side note - we might add that this missional commencement takes place immediately following the sobering announcement, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

So here we pose a question, what exactly is the Kingdom of God? Now I know people have a lot of different ideas concerning the Kingdom of God or Heaven; however, St Paul defines the Kingdom of God in this way, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17).

Think about it, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." What have we learned from our studies? We have learned that in essence the Kingdom of God is to be defined more in spiritual principles than in physical exploits. Thus, the Kingdom is more heart centered than mind focused. It reflects one's innermost being, and often at odds with the carnal world we have fostered.

Thus Jesus sent 72 disciples out two by two to share the message – "the Kingdom of God is at hand." Jesus instructed His newly appointed ambassadors, "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few."

In addition, He said, “take nothing of your own, no money, no sack or extra shoes. You are to go like lambs among wolves. “When you enter a house, first say, “Peace to this house.” If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you.” Stopping here for a moment, it’s noteworthy as to how Jesus instructed them to deliver the peace He said, if *they* are peaceful *your* peace will stay with them, if not, *your* peace will return to you.

If you think about it for a moment, this statement sounds a lot like the charge given to the disciples to forgive or retain the sins of people on that first Easter evening – indeed interesting to say the least.

So then what are we to take away from this morning’s readings? For sure there are a lot of themes that could be followed, but certainly one of the main themes to emerge is the themes of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Righteousness and peace, can you really have one without the other? There are a lot of folks who are looking for peace and they are looking for it in a multitude of ways; unfortunately, many of them are illegal, immoral, unethical, or unhealthy; and they are practices in the darkness. On the other hand, Scripture indicates that righteous, peace and joy in the Holy spirit are intricately connected and practiced in the light of Christ Jesus.

True peace can never be achieved without Jesus; in fact righteous living in Christ is the only means by which you and I can experience the peace that surpasses all understanding. The fact of the matter is - true peace cannot be achieved outside of a personal relationship with

God. So how might we define a personal relationship with God? It's really a good question, and not as easy to define as one might think.

Reading the Bible, participating in the Liturgy, receiving the Sacraments, praying and fasting, doing good deeds - all the preceding are part and parcel of living a pious and righteous life, but without an intimate and personal relationship with Jesus true peace will fail to materialize.

For example, think about it, you can read an author's book, visit his home, send Him emails, do nice things for him, and even eat at his table, but if you fail to spend personal time with the author, learn what makes him happy and/or sad, truly understand his heart and message, and then desire to reflect his love and imitate his concern for others, well then in reality you don't have much of a relationship. Oh, we can say we do, but at best it will only be superficial.

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, came that we might have peace. The essence and the fruit of His Kingdom is peace and joy and the knowledge that our sins are forgiven, which translates into joy in the Holy Spirit. In other words - all is well with my soul.

Hopefully, passing the Peace of Christ at Mass will never be the same again because when we extend the Peace of Christ to others, and when they in return offer that same peace back to us, we are literally establishing and expanding the kingdom of God by linking together the multi-membered Body of Christ in love.

Jesus commissioned 72 disciples to go out 2 by 2 to extend the love of God and establish the Kingdom of God. History records that they did a very good job. Now it is our turn to go and do likewise.

In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.