

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

Occasion: Proper 28

Sunday, November 17, 2019

Year (cycle): C

Resource Website Links:

[The Collect/Readings¹](#)

[Book/Passage Summaries²](#)

[Reflection Question\(s\)³](#)

[Art Reflection Slideshow⁴](#)

The Collect:

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Introductory Note: There is a pervading sense of both the present and the future in each of these readings. Indeed, the readings share a seemingly apocalyptic language with their repeated and related phrases of “and in that day” (Isaiah 12:4, NRSV), and “the days will come” (Luke 21:6), of the un-remembering of “former things” and the creation of “new heavens” (Isaiah 65:17). The second letter to the Thessalonians - and even more so Luke’s Gospel - throw us into a time warp. While they surely point to an anticipated not-yet, there is still something left to do in the already: communal work for the Thessalonians, bold testimony for the Lukan disciples. In this way, the readings are not strictly apocalyptic as much as they are an exhortation about how believers ought to behave in the here and now: to behold, to believe, to be here, and to be ready.

Reading 1

Old Testament: Isaiah 65: 17-25

17 For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;

the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.

18 But be glad and rejoice for ever
in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.
19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.
20 No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
21 They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
22 They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
23 They shall not labour in vain,
or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
and their descendants as well.
24 Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.
25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the Lord.

[Link to Passage Summary](#)

Reflection Question(s): Isaiah 16: 17-25

In the original Hebrew, our first passage from Isaiah (65:17-25) opens with the proclamation, “For, behold, I am about to create new heavens”. While

some translations, such as the King James Version (KJV), retain the interjection “behold”, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) leaves it out—and very much to our loss. For implied in this word (hinneh, behold) is a sense of here-and-nowness that defies time, of being present to something about to become. Whenever “behold” shows up in the Bible, it is heralding the inbreaking of the not-yet, alerting its listener or reader to be here, to be present—and to be ready. And in this passage from Isaiah, those who behold catch a glimpse of God’s ultimate promise and vision. Beholding is part of the joy and delight in such not-yet heavens and earth, part of its promise and its creation. Indeed, there is a remarkable promise at the heart of this passage, one that goes beyond our human understanding of the already and the not-yet: “Before they call I will answer” God tenderly declares (65:24). Our not-yet is already God’s before.

- Where is God already at work in your life and the world around you?
- Where do you see the not-yet breaking into the already of your life?

[Link to Art Reflection Slideshow](#)

Reading 2

Psalm Isaiah 12:2-6

Surely, it is God who saves me; *

I will trust in him and not be afraid.

For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense, *

and he will be my Savior.

Therefore you shall draw water with rejoicing *

from the springs of salvation.

And on that day you shall say, *

Give thanks to the Lord and call upon his Name;

Make his deeds known among the peoples; *

see that they remember that his Name is exalted.

Sing the praises of the Lord, for he has done great things, *

and this is known in all the world.

Cry aloud, inhabitants of Zion, ring out your joy, *

for the great one in the midst of you is the Holy One of Israel.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: *

as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

[Link to Passage Summary](#)

Reflection Question(s): Psalm Isaiah 12:2-6

Not to belabor the point, but the canticle (Isaiah 12:2-6) also begins with “behold” in its original language, again retained in the KJV and left out in the NRSV. While we read “Surely, it is God who saves me,” salvation was originally—and still is—something more rightly and more deeply meant to behold. This passage from Isaiah is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving, a natural response to beholding God’s salvific goodness. Beholding and believing are mutually beneficial, as the next part of the verse attests: “I will trust in him and not be afraid” (12:2b). In addition, if the canticle also included the first verse of Isaiah 12, a helpful parallelism between verses 1-3 and 4-6 would be more apparent; for each of these verse groupings begins with the phrase, “In that day”. Looking more closely at the grammar in the call to thanksgiving in each of these parallels, we might also note that it is distinctly singular in the former and plural in the latter. In other words, the thanks to be given is both individual and communal, and in this way, the Holy One of Israel is fully recognized in the midst of the believing community.

- How does your community of faith reflect thanksgiving to God? How do you?
- How do you “ring out your joy” as a faithful believer?

[Link to Art Reflection Slideshow](#)

Reading 3

Epistle: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

6 Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, 8 and we did not eat anyone’s bread without paying for it; but with toil and labour we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. 9 This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. 10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this command:

Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. 11For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. 12Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. 13Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.

[Link to Passage Summary](#)

Reflection Question(s): 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

It's hard to imagine that Paul was not implying something more than simply paid labor in his exhortation to the Thessalonians. The Greek word translated here as "work" is used almost twenty times in the Pauline epistles, with various connotations. While the emphasis of this chapter of the letter is on idleness, the antonymic implications can just as easily include diligence and commitment as well as work and labor. If we consider the work and labor of Paul's ministry, so clearly in service to proclaiming the Good News, and worthy of imitation (3:7, 9), work and idleness take on deeper meanings. In addition, the accompanying reminder of being in service to each other is typical of Paul's theology; whatever the nature of the work to which he calls his readers and hearers, it is for each of them individually as well as communally, not unlike the individual and communal message of the canticle. "Be here and be diligent—together," is the underlying message I hear in this passage. This is work in which believers surely do not "labor in vain" (Isaiah 65:23) but accomplishes that for which it is purposed. While belief in a new heaven and a new earth—in the return of Jesus—is paramount, Paul is reminding the Thessalonians (and us) that there's still something left to do before we get to the beyond.

- What is the work you still have left to do this side of paradise? What will equip you for engaging in and fulfilling that work?
- What prevents or opposes you from proclaiming the Good News?

[Link to Art Reflection Slideshow](#)

Reading 4

Gospel: Luke 21:5-19

5 When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, 6'As for these things

that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.'

7 They asked him, 'Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?' 8And he said, 'Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, "I am he!" and, "The time is near!" Do not go after them.

9 'When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.' 10Then he said to them, 'Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; 11there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

12 'But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. 13This will give you an opportunity to testify. 14So make up your minds not to prepare your defence in advance; 15for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. 16You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. 17You will be hated by all because of my name. 18But not a hair of your head will perish. 19By your endurance you will gain your souls.

[Link to Passage Summary](#)

Reflection Question(s): Luke 21:5-19

While they may sound apocalyptic to our ears, the words of Jesus as they appear in this passage from Luke would have fallen on the Gospel's original hearers not as a prediction but as a reminder. Luke was writing after the Temple had already fallen; he wasn't prophesying, he was writing to and for a persecuted minority of beleaguered believers under the tyranny of Roman rule. The Temple had in fact been razed to the ground, not one stone left upon another. We must hear this Gospel passage in the context of unimaginable loss. Yet Jesus doesn't seem to be as concerned about what the end time will look like and when it will be as he is about how his disciples will be in between the already and the not-yet. Neither imminence nor future transcendence is the point here; rather, faithful discipleship and testimony in the here and now. The point is that the present moment is an

opportunity for bold testimony, for fortitude even in the face of adversity. Until that ultimate day which will eventually come, Jesus calls those who follow him to be ready, even as they—as we—steadfastly remain and remind.

- Where do you find hope in this passage?
- How do you or your faith community celebrate what God is doing outside the “beautiful stones” of your church building?

[Link to Art Reflection Slideshow](#)

Sources

¹ “Twenty-Third Sunday After Pentecost, ” *The Episcopal Church*, <https://episcopalchurch.org/lectionary/twenty-third-sunday-after-pentecost-0>

² Chris Haslam, “Twenty-Third Sunday After Pentecost-November 17, 2019,” *Comments: Revised Lectionary Commentary*, <http://montreal.anglican.org/comments/cpr33m.shtml?>

³ Thom Rock, “Pentecost 23 (C)-November 17, 2019”, *Bible Study*, <https://episcopalchurch.org/library/bible-study/bible-study-pentecost-23-c-november-17-2019>

⁴ The Revised Common Lectionary, “Year A, Year B, Year C,” *Slideshow Formats*, <https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu//slides.php>