

**The Lessons Appointed for
Use on the
Sunday closest to July 20**



**Proper 14
Year C
RCL**

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20
Psalm 50:1-8, 23-24
Luke 12:32-40

The Collect

The Collect

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.*

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20

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.

Hear the word of the Lord,
you rulers of Sodom!

Listen to the teaching of our God,
you people of Gomorrah!

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.

When you come to appear before me,
who asked this from your hand?

Trample my courts no more;
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.

Your new moons and your appointed festivals
my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me,
I am weary of bearing them.
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.
Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.
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.

If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land;
but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be devoured by the sword;
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Psalm 50:1-8, 23-24

Deus deorum

- 1 The LORD, the God of gods, has spoken; * he has called the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.
- 2 Out of Zion, perfect in its beauty, * God reveals himself in glory.
- 3 Our God will come and will not keep silence; * before him there is a consuming flame, and round about him a raging storm.
- 4 He calls the heavens and the earth from above * to witness the judgment of his people.
- 5 “Gather before me my loyal followers, * those who have made a covenant with me and sealed it with sacrifice.”
- 6 Let the heavens declare the rightness of his cause; * for God himself is judge.
- 7 Hear, O my people, and I will speak: “O Israel, I will bear witness against you; * for I am God, your God.
- 8 I do not accuse you because of your sacrifices; * your offerings are always before me.

23 Consider this well, you who forget God, * lest I rend you and there be none to deliver you.

24 Whoever offers me the sacrifice of thanksgiving honors me; * but to those who keep in my way will I show the salvation of God.”

Luke 12:32-40

Jesus said to his disciples, “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 un-failing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; 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. 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. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near

dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

“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. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

SERMON

Last Sunday, after our meeting with the General Presbyter, Session posed six questions to the congregation:

- What is our mission?
- What are we passionate about?
- What are our resources?
- What are we good at?
- What is unique about us?
- How are we connected to the community?

We are standing at a critical time in the history of Community Presbyterian and we have an opportunity to bring our long life experience to bear on the existential question of our future —why are we here? How does our existence in little Bellefonte, Kentucky further the Gospel? In other words, what is our mission? Do we come only to reap, or are we called also to sow? Dr. Robin Meyers, Senior Minister of the Mayflower Congregational United Church of Christ in Oklahoma City,

spoke a harsh word of reminder:

If the body of Christ has become just one more peculiar gathering of the loyal subjects of empire, singing and praying for the success of the empire, then we have no Good News to offer, only religious propaganda.

That is the question which faces us in 2019. Do we come to celebrate our traditions, or to speak the Gospel into a world which has deafened itself to any such learning? Do we come here to cluck our teeth over the violence which wracks the world, or do we come here to address the hateful words we hear so regularly?

However much some folks like to cry and moan about prayer being taken out of schools and other perceived slights to our faith we're not really under attack by the secular culture. The horrible truth is that we have become irrelevant to the secular culture. What is our mission? One bleak answer was in the story from Darrell

W. Robinson's book, "People Sharing Jesus". It went like this:

"Now it came to pass that a group existed who called themselves fishermen. And lo, there were many fish in the waters all around. In fact, the whole area was surrounded by streams and lakes filled with fish. And the fish were hungry.

Week after week, month after month, and year after year, these who called themselves fishermen met in meetings and talked about their call to fish, the abundance of fish, and how they might go about fishing. Year after year they carefully defined what fishing means, defended fishing as an occupation, and declared that fishing is always to be a primary task of fishermen.

Continually, they searched for new and better methods of fishing and for new and better definitions of fishing. Further they said, "The fishing industry exists by fishing as fire exists by burning." They loved slogans such as "Fishing is the task of every fisherman."

They sponsored special meetings called “Fishermen’s Campaigns” and “The Month for Fishermen to Fish.” They sponsored costly nationwide and world-wide congresses to discuss fishing and to promote fishing and hear about all the ways of fishing such as the new fishing equipment, fish calls, and whether any new bait had been discovered. These fishermen built large, beautiful buildings called “Fishing Headquarters.” The plea was that everyone should be a fisherman and every fisherman should fish. One thing they didn’t do, however: They didn’t fish.”

I am scared silly, church, that this story describes the contemporary church more accurately than we would like. We spend a lot of time talking about fishing. Why do we not fish? Christians have become too passive. Fish or cut bait, but do SOMETHING. To be empowering and meaningful, worship must be in pursuit of a mission.

In our Old Testament passage, Isaiah spoke words of anger on God's behalf.

Hear the word of the Lord,
you rulers of Sodom!
Listen to the teaching of our God,
you people of Gomorrah!

Isaiah wasn't speaking to Sodom or Gomorrah.

Sodom and Gomorrah were long gone by the time Isaiah spoke. All that remained of them was their reputation as the worst places on earth, and Isaiah is addressing the people and leadership of his own people as the worst of the worst. The word of the Lord is coming upon Isaiah in a way that will not permit him to step gingerly around their feelings. Isaiah HAS to tell them what the Lord has told him. The message that Isaiah delivers is that they have misunderstood the relationship that God desires there to be between God and his people. With the best of intentions, the people have taken

the wrong turn, and are not listening when God tells them so. They have become satisfied with talking a good fishing trip; they don't, however, actually fish. Therefore, Isaiah has to yell a little. For those taking notes, this is where I stopped preaching and started meddling. A church without a mission is no longer, in any real sense, a church. Failing to think intentionally about mission is one of the central causes of the empty pews we see, not only at Community Presbyterian, but in churches everywhere. We pray by habit, rather than commitment.

Isaiah hammers this home.

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.

Worse yet, in God's view, the failure to undertake worship in the correct way, and with the correct understanding voids the entire experience

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.

God says, through Isaiah, that if your hands do work your heart doesn't share, God will not hear. Not to put too fine a point on it, it is God's demand that we worship Him with intention. Sleepy worship won't do. Obligatory worship won't do. Going to worship to bargain for a better job won't do. Attendance to obtain the good opinion of your friends and neighbors won't do. There has to be a clear, unequivocal reason to get up and go to church, and that reason has to be satisfactory to God and God alone. How can we communicate that

to a visitor for whom this is new and alien?

Every Sunday, we recite the Apostle's Creed. If that visitor came and asked us why we do that, would we be able to tell him the meaning of the words we say? Do those wonderful, faith-affirming words that have stood us for centuries rain down on your soul and drench you, or do they run off like water from a duck's back? Are you touched when the words "Our Father, hallowed be thy name" swell up from every mouth in the room, or is your mind somewhere else and those prayerful words wind up someplace in your ear but never in your heart?

If we are simply going through the motions, doing things and saying words that don't sink into our very souls, who could blame the visitor who says to himself, "These are very nice people, and very welcoming, but the world is full of nice, welcoming people. I don't understand why these people are doing these things and

they can't tell me. I can worship God just as well at Starbuck's or on the golf course, and I understand Starbuck's and golf.” If that happens, there is one more empty seat in the pew; one more worshiper who will not join his voice with us; one more child of God who cannot see the relevance of a living relationship with God.

That's the crisis Christ's church faces today. We are one generation short of extinction. And if we go extinct, if the doors of the church are closed, it won't be the authorities nailing them shut as they did in Russia, it will be like the ending of the buggy whip industry – we will close because no one can give a good reason why we are still needed.

On the whole, we have a pretty gloomy situation here, church. But it's not a hopeless situation. There is room to turn around. Jesus tells us, time and again that God

does not seek our destruction. He seeks our salvation. It is God's wish that we turn from those things which do not please Him, and devote ourselves, heart and hand, to those things which do please Him. It is because God loves us that he warns us so severely when we stray from the path. God is begging his people to come to him. This is the love God has for his people.

Pray on our six questions, church. There is nothing more important at this time. Pray.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

For two generations, Community Presbyterian Church has been the beating heart of Bellefonte. To raise up the children of our community in the ways of God was our mission. That mission, in major part, has been taken by Bridges and may God bless their work.

What is our mission now, church?

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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