

"Readiness and Risk" Isaiah 1:1, 10-20 Hebrews 11:8-16 Luke 12:32-40
 New Horizons Presbyterian Church August 7, 2016 Ord 19C

Debate about "authentic" worship

has existed from the earliest days

of our Judeo-Christian tradition.

It continues today.

Isaiah is calling out

to his people who have become intrigued

by the pagan worship that surrounds them.

Their worship has taken on

forms and rituals

that are not reflective

of God's presence and direction

in their lives.

Burnt and sacrificial offerings

have taken the place

of faithful observance of the Law.

Isaiah intends

for the "chosen people"

to recognize God's continuing power and might

as Creator;

to reform and redirect their worship

to honor that supremacy.

If you want to sacrifice (he says)

behave in terms of the pain and distress

of your world.

Those offerings will make testimony

to your obedience as God's child.

Give up the pagan symbols

that distract you from God's presence

and action among you.

Trust God's leading in your worship

and you will know the good life.

Faith is not a commodity

to be purchased

or measured

or traded.

Faith is a way of life

based on the **gift**

of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Faith is a living relationship

with God

and with Jesus Christ

--- a commitment

that reflects mutual response.

That relationship

with God and Christ

leads us into new lands

- not unlike the patriarchs and exiles.

Belief is tested.

Discoveries are made

--- about living in trusting relationship

--- a most difficult stance for most Americans.

Faith becomes real,

living,

when it is acted out.

Isaiah puts it succinctly:

"cease to do evil,

do good,

seek justice,

rescue the oppressed,

defend the orphan,

plead for the widow.

In our time

such good work is often considered political.

It is also an act of faith;

to seek abundant life for all people -

-- the reward held out to the faithful.

Another way of thinking of this is:

Keep the traditions of the ancestors.

That is,

reflect God's image in your daily behavior.

It isn't reserved for "Sunday best".

It witnesses

to a basic relationship

of faith in prayer

and contemplation.

It is entrusting oneself

and one's life to God.

You may be surprised

how frequently

you actually you do that.

Behavior is motivated by many things.

I believe people of faith **are** able to act,

at least some of the time, without a "plan".

Faithful response to another **can** just happen.

The writer to the Hebrews

calls us to be confident;

to rest secure in our salvation.

That basic faith understanding

tells us that God is for us!

God's will and intent

for the whole creation is good

--- even now!

Be confident also

in God's power and ability
 to effect God's intent
 --- and open to be
 a part of that actualization.

The writer of Hebrews holds up
 Abraham and Sarah as models
 of trust and confidence in God
 and God's intent.

Abraham didn't get to see
 his family become a great nation.
 He didn't get to enter the promised land.

He lived in faith
 that God could and would
 accomplish the promises given.

Sarah could not believe
 that she would have the joy of bearing a child
 --- but trusted God's words
 and bore a son
 who became leader of his people.

Trusting God's promises;
 living in expectation
 willing to move forward into unknown territory;
 obedient to God's call;
 certain of God's fidelity
 we live in hope and conviction.

We are motivated
 to serve as God's people
 in a sometimes chaotic and confusing world.

"Live Into Hope"
 is the hymn that comes to mind.
 It could become the marching song of a congregation.

Live into hope of captives freed, of sight regained, the end of greed.

the oppressed shall be the first to see the year of God's own jubilee.

Live into hope the blind shall see with insight and with clarity,

removing shades of pride and fear --- A vision of our God brought near.

Live into hope of liberty, the right to speak, the right to be,

the right to have one's daily bread, to hear God's word and thus be fed.

Live into hope of captives freed from chains of fear, or want, or greed,

God now proclaims our full release to faith and hope and joy and peace.

Amen.