“***Repairer of the Breach***” by S. Finlan, at The First Church, September 1, 2019

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**Isaiah 58:9b–12**

If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
10 if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
 then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.

11 The Lord will guide you continually . . . you shall be like a watered garden,
 like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.

12 Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
 you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

**Hebrews 13:3, 5–8**

3Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured . . . . 5Keep your lives free from the love of money . . . for he has said, “I will never leave you or forsake you. . . . The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?”

7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. 8Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

A preacher’s job is to dig out treasure from an ancient text that says something important for all times, even those quite different from the one in which the passage was written. There is much that is useful in these two texts, one from 25 centuries ago, and one from 19 and a half centuries ago.

I was struck by Isaiah’s remark “remove . ., . the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil” (58:9). That seems so modern, or timeless. He is calling for people to drop their petty carping and blaming. It is doing damage in society. Instead, he calls for good deeds. If you feed the poor and minister to the needy, “your light shall rise in the darkness. . . . The Lord will guide you continually . . . you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water” (58:10–11). So, instead of spewing out blame, you will be gushing out healthy water, which stands for spiritual blessings.

Finally, you will get the name “repairer of the breach” (v. 12). This refers to repairing a breach in the walls, and so restoring safety to the city. This was a very meaningful name for people who were trying to rebuild the crumbling walls of Jerusalem. This text comes from the time of Third Isaiah. It can’t come from First Isaiah, when the walls were strong and the Judeans even dared to challenge the Assyrians to war. It can’t come from Second Isaiah, who probably never *saw* Jerusalem, but lived in Babylon during the time of Captivity. This text comes from after the return from Captivity, when they are faced with the disrepair and poverty of Jerusalem. If one is the repairer of a breach and a “restorer of streets to live in” (v. 12), one is contributing to the security of the city.

To appreciate what the author is saying, we have to imagine ourselves living in the once-great but now run-down city of Jerusalem, which needs security, economic recovery, and reminding about its spiritual mission. When Third Isaiah calls them to pay attention to the needs of the afflicted and to refrain from pointing the finger, he is reminding them of their *values*. But he doesn’t just criticize, he encourages; he promises that they “will be like a watered garden” (v. 11).

Summing up this text, I see two problems and two answers. The problem of the pointing of the finger is answered by having compassion for the poor and afflicted. Surliness is replaced by kindness. The problem of security and worry is answered by hope: by the promise of being well watered and having repaired walls.

The New Testament letter to the Hebrews is obviously written in a very different time and circumstances, but there are some similarities. There are people suffering; readers are exhorted to have compassion; those who do good for the community are mentioned; and hope is affirmed. Let’s start with the remark, “Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; remember those who are being tortured” (13:3). Some Christians were suffering for their faith, and he wanted people to pray for them. We, too, should pray for persecuted Christians in China, India, and Pakistan. We should also be offended when Muslims and others are persecuted, as also in China. Religious persecution is always wrong, whether it is directed at Christianity or other religions. American values are firmly opposed to religious persecution, and American law sanctions doing business with those who commit murder and other human rights violations. The most important of these laws is the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2012, which has sanctioned and prohibited from entering the U.S. certain Russian gangsters, Saudi assassins, and Burmese generals. This law acts like a repairer of the breach, trying to block the worst foreign criminals from gaining influence and business partners in America. Of course, there is much more that needs to be done.

“Keep your lives free from the love of money” (13:5), Hebrews writes. It is love of money that drives criminals and their enablers, and that endangers our democracy. There are breaches in our walls, and only our *values*, our character, and our laws can repair them. Our values do make a difference. We need to draw the gospel values deeper into our lives, so that we are not tempted to bend or break the rules for the sake of money. We need to stand by our principles. God can help us in this effort. Hebrews reminds us that God has said “I will never leave you or forsake you” (13:5; Deut 31:6).

It goes on to say, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you” (13:7). Leaders who speak words of hope are striving to be repairers of the breach. The truth and goodness of Jesus can be infectious; he repairs the breach like no one else can. When you take on the Jesus nature, when you seek to do God’s will, you, too, are a repairer of the breach.

Finally, Hebrews says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (13:8). The values and the character to which we aspire, the eternal life for which we hope, and the lawfulness we need in our lives, all come from Jesus Christ. He *embodies* honesty and truth, he *has* that character, and he helps us take these to heart and to live the good life. “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?” (13:6). The issues of life are fundamentally between you and God; they are not determined by people’s opinions. Jesus is the light on your path, and he is also the goal.