

Listen My Children -- 090918

In our Hebrew Bible reading today, Isaiah gloriously predicts the great day when all violence, want and injustice are gone, the world is at peace and the planet is healthy. In a time like ours, when this is hardly the case, the prophet's predictive promises provide the vision of a day in "The Sweet Bye and Bye," when all manner of things will be well – just as they brought hope to the Israelites during their exile in Babylon. In our modern life, anyone predicting a time when all will be well would be branded a kook, or worse, a charlatan. The only thing we're hoping for now is that we can somehow slow, stop, or ideally, reverse the clear degradation of Earth and life by humans that dominates so much of our consciousness.

The vision Isaiah describes lets us see what God intends for the world. But there are two factors that must come into play: God's will, and Human peacemaking; without both of which the great day will not come about. God's will being notoriously difficult to prove, we must take our clues about what that might entail from the lives led by those we admire. For example, Jesus.

Human peacemaking is the key to all true progress and Earth-saving innovation. We are all – everyone in the whole world – Israelites now. Our movement is presently in the direction of environmental chaos, and thus exile from the

World we love. We will only be taken further into the captivity of war, poverty, pollution and policing unless we, as Paul says to James and his friends, "Listen, for God has chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith; to be heirs of the kingdom. But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you? And God will not bring about this day until we do listen.

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." And the delicious irony of any life of faith is knowing that we cannot hope to bring about the Will of God, the Greater Good, the sweet Land of Milk and Honey, without God's help. So we have the blessed assurance that God will come to our assistance if we make it our business to assist in furthering God's will.

When we declare, as we just finished doing in our psalm, "It is God who gives bread to the hungry and sets prisoners free," we must realize that God will only do so through us. When we glorify the Lord for giving sight to the blind and raising up those who are bowed down, for protecting the stranger, upholding the widow and orphan, loving the just and thwarting the plans of the wicked, we must realize that it is our responsibility, and also our vocation to do those

things, to prioritize those things over wealth and power desperately masquerading as security and greatness, to be God's heart and hands and voices here amongst Creation.

We give sight to the blind by making education available to all; we raise up the bowed-down by honestly caring for the poor; we protect the stranger by dealing with immigrants graciously, not by incarcerating them and their children indefinitely and separately. Likewise we uphold the widow and the orphan by treating their compassionate treatment as the means to a solution, not as part of the problem. As for loving the just and thwarting the plans of the wicked, we needn't look far for opportunities to do those things.

Instead, what we see is us making our business the seeking of worldly wealth. Unless and until those with power over others and power to abuse the planet reverse their priorities things will only get worse. This means putting peaceful practices in front of corporate profits. This means that developing means of feeding and clothing and housing and employing everyone, and that means everyone. And these means must be sustainable, or else what is the point? Peace on Earth and Goodwill amongst Humankind, for 15 famous minutes, followed by everyone catching a ride in a really big handbasket?

Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took

him aside and began to rebuke him. Of course it's easier to think like Peter – passionate Peter – who is outraged at Jesus' words and tells him so. It is much more exciting to think that everything will magically and suddenly get much better because God wills it. But Jesus shakes Peter out of his prideful, passionate ignorance, saying, "Get behind me, Satan! You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Whatever we set our minds upon is what gets addressed; and to realize a dream, we must not only visualize it, we must walk in its direction.

"Those who want to save their lives will lose them, and those who lose their lives for the sake of the gospel will save themselves by saving others. For what does it profit a person to gain the whole world by forfeiting lives – others' lives, and by association their very own? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?" God will neither demand nor accept any death for a ransom; Jesus took care to obviate that theory. But the price of life God not only accepts, but indeed demands: What does the Lord require of us, how much? Only to do as Jesus bids, to set our minds on divine things over human things, to act justly, to love and offer mercy, and to walk humbly wherever we go.