

Notes for Next Sunday

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Isaiah 53:3-9a). Calamity in the form of the fall of Jerusalem had come into the lives of the Israelites. This disaster was a result of their idol worship instead being faithful to the true God. Instead of returning to the Lord in repentance, they added a number of fast days to what they were already doing. However, their acts of fasting were just that “acts.” The point of fasting is to bring about humbleness and a change of behavior. They, however, continued to mistreat their fellowmen. In fact they behaved even more indecently than they had before. All the while they complained that God was not listening to them. God, through Isaiah, told them that when they would come him with a true repentant heart, he would indeed be ready to hear and help them.

Epistle (1 Corinthians 2:1-12). The Corinthians were people of great wealth (Corinth was the crossroads of world trade). They were also big into wisdom (human). This had led to them go about choosing which leader they wanted to join (chapter 1:10-17) and had led to division in their Christian community. Now Paul contrasts his style (not eloquent) to what they were expecting from a great apostle. He reminds them that message is the important thing and not the messenger. Paul's message is Spirit driven and is the only one that can bring salvation.

Gospel (Matthew 5:13-20). In verses 1-12 Jesus had taught, blessed and strengthened the people on the Mount. They had heard the Good News from the Son of God. In verses 13-16 they now receive their calling identity of who they are to be and what they are to do. In verses 17-20 Jesus tells the crowd that he has come to not abolish the Law and prophets but to fulfill even the smallest letter of the Law. When Jesus speaks of surpassing the righteousness of Pharisees and teachers he pointing out that true righteousness is the result of a right relationship with Jesus. Good works are a fruit of faith in Him (Eph. 2:8-10), something that most scribes and Pharisees did not possess. (TLSB)

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 58:3-9a

³ ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ “Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. ⁴ Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. ⁵ Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? ⁶ “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? ⁸ Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. “If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

58:5 like a reed. Bent by wind and weight, not sincerity. (TLSB)

58:5 *sackcloth and ashes*. *Sackcloth* denotes worthless clothing, while *ashes* refers to vile places and a reclining in an inferior place which is not furnished with carpets. (Luther)

58:6 *of injustice*. The Lord calls for acts of justice and righteousness, rather than lip service. Religious observances cannot substitute for moral integrity (cf Ps 15; Mi 6:6–8). Apart from a love toward neighbor, worship and fasting deadens people to the weightier matters of justice (cf Mt 23:23). (TLSB)

58:6 *oppressed*. The rules of enslavement of fellow Israelites and their lands (Ex 21:2-11; Lv 25:39-55; Dt 15:12-18) were often abused in order to retain people as slaves and hold their lands. (TLSB)

58:7 *share your food ... provide ... shelter ... clothe*.† The outward evidence of genuine faith. (CSB)

58:8 *light*. Light comes from doing the work of the Lord, rather than darkness of one's own works (cf 5:20; 8:20; 47:5; 60:2). (TLSB)

58:9 *Healing*. It means progress, increase, and your growth in this life and the next. A generous hand never suffered want. God's mercy is wider than ours. If we have given ourselves, it will be given us a hundredfold, as Matt. 19:29 tells us. "You may cheerfully give to your neighbor; I will give you much more in all material things, and you shall quickly grow rich." (Luther)

EPISTLE – 1 Corinthians 2:1-12

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ²For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

2:4 *demonstration*. The Greek word is used of producing proofs in an argument in court. Paul's preaching was marked by the convincing demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit. (CSB)

⁶We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. ⁸None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" – ¹⁰but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

2:6 *mature*. Well-grounded in the faith, benefiting from a deeper understanding (cf 14:20). (TLSB)

2:7 *secret*. Paul's message is hidden only from a sinful and unreceptive world. (TLSB)

2:8 *rulers of this age*. The leaders at Jerusalem or the spiritual rulers and authorities against which we contend (Eph 6:12). (TLSB)

2:9 *what God has prepared*. Miraculous acts of salvation in the OT, now surpassed by the mystery and miracles of Jesus' works. God has already provided these great things. (TLSB)

2:12 *spirit of the world*. The spirit of human wisdom as alienated from God—the attitude of the sinful nature (Ro 8:6–7). (CSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 5:13-20

¹³“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. ¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

5:13 *salt*. Salt was produced by drying seawater from mineral deposits near the Salt Sea preserves, so it reminded the Israelites that God would preserve His covenant with Abraham, including the messianic promise that through Abraham “all the families of the earth” would be blessed (Gn. 12:1-3). (TLSB)

5:13 *loses its saltiness*. The salt used in Palestine can become tasteless when exposed to the weather for a long period of time. When that happens, there is no way to restore it.

5:14 *light*. Light casts out darkness. Darkness is associated with evil, with danger, with the condition of being lost and unable to find one’s way. Jesus’ disciples—because they have become his disciples—are the world’s light, for in Jesus, light has begun to shine in Galilee (4:16).

5:14 *city on a hill*. Just as there is no hiding the light of a city on a hill, the light of a true disciple cannot be hidden. (TLSB)

5:15 *bowl*. It was a measure for grain, holding about 2 gallons. The idea of lighting a lamp, burning precious oil, only to cover it with a bowl that conceals its light, is patently absurd. So, says Jesus, is a Christian who conceals his or her faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

¹⁷“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

5:17 *the Law*. The first five books of the Jewish Scriptures (our OT). (CSB)

5:17 *the Prophets*. Not only the Latter Prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which we call Major Prophets, and the 12 Minor Prophets (lumped together by the Jews as “the Book of the Twelve”)—but also the so-called Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings). (CSB)

5:18 *smallest letter*. One word in Greek (*iota*), which we use when we say, “It doesn’t make one iota of difference.” It is the nearest Greek equivalent to the Hebrew *yodh*, the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet. (CSB)

5:18 *least stroke of a pen*. The Greek word for this phrase means “horn” and was used to designate the slight embellishment or extension of certain letters of the Hebrew alphabet (somewhat like the bottom of a “j”). (CSB)