Comments **Tuesday of Holy Week** **March 26, 2024**

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.
www.montreal.anglican.org/comments/ *© Chris Haslam*

Isaiah 49:1-7 NRSV

This is the second Servant Song. The servant speaks to Israelites scattered around the Mediterranean ("coastlands"); he identifies himself as chosen before he was born (like Jeremiah, Paul and John the Baptist) and even named (like Jesus). Further, God made him an effective instrument in proclaiming his message ("sharp sword", v. 2). Perhaps God hid him for protection or in preparation for his mission. V. 3 may tell us who the servant is: "Israel", the community of the faithful, led by the prophet. They will show God's power to others ("glorified"). But the servant retorts (v. 4): despite all our/my efforts, no one listens! Surely I minister on God's behalf and God will "reward" me for it (even if people don't). The servant's "strength" (v. 5) is from God; he is to turn "Jacob" (Israel) back to God. God (not the prophet) will gather "Israel" to him. But his mission is to all peoples, not only wayward Israelites and the faithful ("survivors", v. 6). God continues to speak to the servant, "one deeply despised" (v. 7), hated by many and "the slave of rulers": God's fidelity is his surety that all, even rulers, will hold him in awe.

Psalm 71:1-14 NRSV

The psalmist finds sanctuary in his trust in God; even so, he asks God to be his reference point ("rock", v. 3) and strength in life, to rescue him from "cruel" (v. 4) and ungodly people. He has trusted in God *since his youth* (v. 5) and, as v. 18 shows, he is now in "old age" and has "gray hairs". God has supported him throughout his life ("from my birth", v. 6). Note the belief that God caused him to be born. From vv. 7-10, we learn that his enemies consider him so evil that they avoid him *like the plague*: a "portent" (v. 7) was always evil. The psalmist especially seeks God's help now that he no longer has the strength to defend himself; his foes believe that God has forsaken him: may they be disgraced and scorned (v. 13).

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 NRSV

The "message" of Christ crucified, risen and alive is God's power to us, but to those who hear the good news and reject "the cross" it is nonsense. This, Paul says, God prophesied through Isaiah (v. 19). He has decried divisions in the church at Corinth; he now recognizes two groups of humans: the "wise" (v. 19) and "those who believe" (v. 21). Are, he asks rhetorically, the Jewish "scribe" (v. 20) and the rationalist ("debater") – both possessors of worldly wisdom – truly wise? Through the coming of Christ, God has shown worldly wisdom to be folly, for (v. 21) one can't "know God through wisdom", i.e. in a philosophical way. *Knowing God* is experiential. In fact, God chose to save believers through the apparent folly of what Paul preaches ("our proclamation"). To "demand signs" (miracles, v. 22) is to refuse to trust in God; "Jews" refused Christ due to their particular expectations in a messiah. To "desire wisdom" is to construct a religion whose demands one is prepared to accept. (The "Greeks" in v. 22 are unbelieving *non-Jews*.) God's ways are not human ways (v. 25).

Consider yourselves, Christians at Corinth (v. 26): few of you are what *the world* would have chosen: few are *worldly wise*, "powerful" or aristocratic. But God's way is to choose those of apparently little account ("foolish", "weak", v. 27) to show the apparently important that they are wrong, to "shame" them. This is God's paradoxical way (v. 28); he does away with boasting. Christ's living in human form started a new way of being human (v. 30): we are set apart for his purposes ("sanctification") and no longer controlled by evil ("redemption") so that we become one with God ("righteousness") – so that we can (as God commanded through Jeremiah) "boast in the Lord" (v. 31). Christ is true wisdom.

John 12:20-36 NRSV

At the time of the Passover ("the festival"), some Gentiles ("Greeks") travel to Jerusalem, probably because they believe in God. Their request "to see Jesus" (v. 21, to understand his message), is conveyed to him by "Andrew and Philip" (v. 22), the two disciples with Greek names. Jesus takes this opportunity to announce that his "hour" (v. 23), his time of self revelation, determined by God, has come. He can now tell what it means for the Son to be glorified. When Jesus is glorified, then all people will truly be able to see him, but this is not the time for interviews.

He uses an example from nature to speak of the significance of his death: the paradox that a "grain of wheat" (v. 24) only bears fruit after it seems to have died and has been buried. Jesus' death makes possible salvation for others. That the meaning of life eludes those who *live it up* is also a paradox; self-centeredness ends up destroying a person. ("Hate", v. 25, is a Semitism for *love less*.) Serving Jesus involves following his example; this will be honoured by the Father (v. 26). In v. 27, Jesus struggles with his impending death: should he ask the Father to free him from the need to suffer and die? No, he says: such avoidance would negate his mission; his death is God's will (v. 28a). The voice from heaven reassures: his lifework and teaching have been signs of God's glory, of his power and presence; God will act again in raising him. The crowd miss the point of the message (v. 29), so Jesus tells them that God has spoken so that they may believe that he comes from God; he already knows this ("not for mine", v. 30). This is when ("now", v. 31) those who willfully turn away from him ("this world") are condemned (it is they who are judged, not him), and when the devil ("the ruler of this world") ceases to have power over people. When he is "lifted up from the earth" (v. 32), i.e. crucified and exalted in glory, salvation of all will be possible. This is the paradoxical "kind of death" (v. 33) he will endure.

The crowd think that the expected ideal king ("Messiah", v. 34) will be with them forever, so how can he leave them, "be lifted up" if he is "the Son of Man"? Jesus answer (vv. 35-36) is indirect: in effect, he says now is their last chance to opt for his way, to become children of God. He is "the light".