

## Sunday Thought

7<sup>th</sup> August 2022 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Readings

Isaiah: 1 - 1, 10 - 20

Psalms 50: 1 - 6, 23

Hebrews 11: 1 - 3, 8 - 16

Luke 12: 32 - 40



### Who is Serving Who?

At precisely five minutes before the Sunday service was to begin Rose and Jack settled into the pew which everyone else knew to leave free for them. The cushions were habitually shaped to their sitting parts, except that the indentations were now a little more pronounced. As expected, the service followed the familiar pattern of hymns, prayers, and scripture readings, but then came a surprise change. The minister introduced a visiting preacher. The congregation studied their guest. He stood tall, not really needing the raised lectern, and for a full two minutes silently surveyed the gathering. His penetrating gaze drew almost everyone's attention. He announced no text and began with a startling announcement, *'I spoke with the Lord this week. He gave me a message for you. He said, 'I'm glad you're here, but I don't really want you to worship as you do every week. In fact I've had more than enough of your dreary, uninspiring words, and those special songs and activities you devise because you think they could attract more people from outside. I haven't asked you for special gatherings and anniversaries which become a annual ritual. They're for your own satisfaction. They're not a real expression of how you feel about me or how you will live next week. Do you really expect me to answer the same garbled, half-asleep prayers which you make every week?'*

If such a sermon introduction surprises you it shouldn't. The prophet Isaiah spoke very similar words to God's people. They're in today's reading. Isaiah was one of the greatest of *'God's Messengers'* who lived and preached in Jerusalem for forty years, through the reigns of four kings of Judah and various times of conquest and freedom, true praise and godless idolatry, plenty and poverty. Many of the prophetic messages in the book which bears his name prepare us to understand the words and works of Jesus and the whole Gospel of *repentance, faith, and new beginnings.*

If we read on in the words from Isaiah - the preacher would remind us - we come to the crux of God's message. He was saying, *Let's get back to basics and ask what it is I really want from my people in worship and life. What I really do want is honest worship, and your urgent concern for justice for the poor and dispossessed; for peace in place of conflict; for true love for me in place of all these words and boring customs.'* My thoughts are immediately turned to that other prophet, Micah, who wrote, *'What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy and walk humbly with your God.'* That's true worship!

It's what Isaiah was longing for when he went into the Temple of God (*Isaiah 6*). Contrast that with our services! He saw the Lord and his glory flooding the place of worship. He was humbled, broken in penitence, then forgiven and ready to be challenged to serve the Lord and speak for him.



Jesus' story in today's Gospel reading, turns up-side-down our understanding of Christian life and worship. It is a picture of servants staying up late to be ready for their Master coming home. In response to their obedience and faithfulness the Master make them sit down at his table while he waits on them. Apply that to our services of worship and Christian life. It's not

all about us making efforts to meet with God, but rather our being ready for him to meet us. In worship, our prayer and praise are good, but how much more exciting when we worship expecting an *Isaiah moment*, when God meets us in a glorious time of renewal, answered prayer and challenges of the moment! No longer continually knocking on God's door, but ready for him to knock us up, however late the hour, and wait on us. That's like the grace of God which brought Jesus to be our Saviour. The Lord who was ready to wash his disciples' feet

Returning to the outrageous preacher. He would go on, like Isaiah to give them the way of putting things right. *God says, 'Let's sit down together and get our relationship right. I will forgive you and give you a whole new life and vision, but in return I expect you to trust me and obey me.'*

The memorable passage from the letter to the Hebrews tells of so many heroes of the past who have discovered for themselves how living by faithful obedience to God their whole life became a great song of praise. Special mention is given to Abraham whose faith involved following God along an unknown path toward a veiled future. He was always moving on even when it seemed the Lord was taking him through the most inexplicable times of trial and testing. God had knocked on his door to make him amazing promises in response to his faith and obedience. Those promises are still being gloriously fulfilled today in people just like us!

**A prayer of true worship** [based on Psalm 50]

Lord, when the moon sends a silver pathway across the waters, like a road to heaven,  
When sunrise and sunset tinge the whole world with colours of glory,



When storm winds and summer breezes suggest the many moods of your Spirit,  
When I read of the heroic faith of saints, past and present,  
When the preacher's words and congregational songs  
Stir the depth of my being,  
May my worship be more than words.

I want it to be a service of compassion, a pursuit of justice,

A renewal of my promise to trust you and to obey your 'love commands'.