

Readings for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

10th August 2025

First Reading: Isaiah 1:1,10-20

The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt-offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.

When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation – I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

Come now, let us argue it out, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Second Reading: Hebrews 11:1-3,8-16

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old – and Sarah herself was barren – because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, ‘as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.’

All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

Gospel: St Luke 12:32-40

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.'

A Reflection for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

If, like me, you were ever a Scout or a Guide, you will know that the motto of these organisations is 'Be Prepared'. They support and encourage young people in the development of personal values and skills that prepare them to respond to the many challenges that they will face in life. Part of being prepared is about thinking ahead and anticipating what might happen. And being prepared for the things that we can reasonably anticipate helps us to deal with the unexpected better than we otherwise might.

I was not the greatest Girl Guide and, in my early teens, my anticipation and preparedness was not all it might have been. As a result, one day I cut my finger very badly while on camp. Fortunately, the leaders were better prepared than I, and one had recently done her First Aid training. Even so, I have the dubious achievement of being the first person that group ever had to take to hospital from camp. Duly stitched up, I returned later and was more careful afterwards.

The necessity of being prepared is also what Jesus is telling his followers in the second half of today's Gospel. For the last six weeks, our Gospel readings have all been from that part of Luke's Gospel where Jesus was travelling from Galilee towards Jerusalem. As he did so, the crowds gathered to hear what this unusual teacher had to say, and to ask him questions, keen to hear his perspective on the issues that concerned them. And Jesus taught them about the values of God's kingdom, about generosity and justice and love, about letting go of our anxieties about material wealth and social standing. So we have heard familiar parables such as those of the Good Samaritan and the Rich Fool, and familiar teachings such as the Lord's Prayer.

He has told them that the Kingdom of God has come near and now he urges them to be prepared for the day when that kingdom will come in all its fulness: 'Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit...' and 'You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.' We know that Jesus will return, that God's kingdom will finally come in all its fulness, we just don't know when, so we must 'Be Prepared!'

I came across a phrase recently that I haven't heard for many years. I think it used to be on one those humorous motivational stickers that were around in the 80s or 90s: 'Jesus is coming – look busy!' It's amusing but misses the

point – we can't live our lives in a constant state of heightened awareness, trying to look busy with what we think Jesus might expect to see when he turns up. So how can we 'be prepared'? Being a disciple, a follower of Jesus, is about much more than simply being nice and keeping our more selfish thoughts to ourselves. It's about living a transformed life that consciously tries to cultivate God's values in the way we live. This cultivation is rather like gardening – it requires continual attention or we may suddenly realise that the weeds are taking over. And like gardening, we have a number of tools in the shed that we can use to help us.

Our readings today illustrate a number of these tools. First and foremost, Isaiah says 'Hear the word of the Lord ... Listen to the teaching of our God'. He went on to point out to the people that they had surrounded themselves with so many festivals, rules and offerings that they were focussing on those and ignoring what God really teaches – an ever-present danger to churches! Festivals and so on are not wrong in themselves but they should not divert us from God himself. So we are to stop paying lip service to God with the frills of religion if we don't then follow through.

Listening to God is something we can all do, using the words of Scripture, in prayer, in our observations of the world around us. But listening to God takes time and it takes stillness, so a second tool in our shed is the concept of Sabbath. We all need Sabbath time, time to stop, be quiet and still, and consciously seek God's presence and God's will.

Good listening is not just hearing the words, it is pondering and savouring them, it is reflecting on how we might apply them in our lives. So action becomes another tool in the shed. Applying what God teaches us in our lives leads us to practising God's core values of generosity, justice and love. We have heard various examples of this in our readings over the past few weeks. As Isaiah says towards the end of today's passage, we are to do good, seek justice and care for the vulnerable. We are to communicate our faith through our actions.

Sometimes, our action is to watch for where God is already at work in the world and join in. Where do we see the values of God's kingdom already being practised in our own community or further afield, and what can we do to help and prosper that work? And, of course, we should remember that God is at work everywhere, not just in activities that happen to be labelled as 'Christian', or indeed as any other religion.

As Paul shows in the passage from Hebrews, and as he will continue next week, yet another tool available to us is the example, good and not-so-good, of those who have gone before us, from whom we can learn. And he reminds us of how God's promises are trustworthy when humans struggle to trust.

And the final tool we have that I want to mention today is the art of gratitude. An attitude of gratitude so often changes the way we see everything else, especially gratitude for the many treasures we have that money can't buy. Treasures such as the unconditional love of a friend or family member, the beauty of creation so evident in this area, our Christian brothers and sisters who help keep us rooted in our faith, all of which pale into insignificance compared with the treasure of the love of God.

These are all things that help us to 'Be Prepared', ready to face the challenges of life with fortitude and grace, that enable us to share God's love and care with our neighbours near and far, that store up treasure in heaven and ready us for the coming of God's kingdom. Like gardening, they don't happen overnight, but practised with diligence, there will be no need to 'look busy' when Jesus comes.

I'd like to conclude with a Franciscan Blessing that I came across recently:

MAY GOD BLESS YOU with discomfort,
at easy answers, half-truths,
and superficial relationships
so that you may live
deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger
at injustice, oppression,
and exploitation of people,
so that you may work for
justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears,
to shed for those who suffer pain,
rejection, hunger, and war,
so that you may reach out your hand
to comfort them and
to turn their pain to joy.

And may God bless you
with enough foolishness
to believe that you can
make a difference in the world,
so that you can do
what others claim cannot be done,
to bring justice and kindness
to all our children and the poor.

Amen