

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People
23rd Sunday after Pentecost – Year C

RCL Readings – Isaiah 65:17-25; Isaiah 12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 21:5-19

ACNA Readings – Malachi 3:13-4:6; Psalm 98; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-16; Luke 21:5-19

Introduction. The original authorship to the famous phrase “patience is a virtue” is a hard one to pin down. It appeared in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* in the 14th century but was most likely not his creation at the time. Galatians tells us that patience is a fruit of the Spirit. Patience is one of those qualities that helps us endure times of trial and is often translated as long-suffering. Patience is a characteristic of God as he is long-suffering of us. And it is a characteristic we are all going to solely need more of as our world continues to suffer through wars, increased violence, and economic uncertainty.

Common Theme. The lectionary cycle is drawing to a close as Jesus is now in Jerusalem for the last time and about to consummate the redemption at the cross, sealed in his resurrection. Jesus is going to make all things new. Our readings today all carry reflections on the future redemption and give us hope and courage to endure until the end.

Isaiah 65:17-25. In beautiful poetic form, Isaiah describes some of the attributes of the world to come in which the results of the Fall of Man are undone. One aspect of the redemption is the renewing of all things, both in heaven and on earth. Everything that had become corrupted returns to its intended idyllic state. Jerusalem becomes a city of joy and praise, the ageing process slows down, and people's possessions are never taken by others demonstrating transformations in both the biological and sociological realms. Even the animal kingdom reacts differently as the wolf and lamb cohabitate and the food chain returns to the Edenic diet with the lion eating straw. Isaiah links us back to the Garden of Eden when he alludes to dust being the serpent's food (Gen 3:14). John declares that God so loved the world that he sent his son. God didn't just love the people in the world, he loves the world he created as well. The redemption won through the resurrection of Jesus affects all of Creation, not just humanity. Isaiah notes that the work of redemption even repairs heaven. We often think of heaven as being perfect. But if that were true then why would the Lord need to create a new one if the old one was perfect? How much more perfect can you get? In Jewish tradition (and the Bible), the rebellion against God began in heaven. Thus heaven itself has the stain of sin for that is where sin began. Revelation 12 describes a war in heaven in which Micheal battles the Enemy and casts him out. The redemptive activity of Jesus is also to renew heaven and make it pure once again (see Heb 9:23-24).

Isaiah 12. Isaiah prophesies a time when the people of God will praise the Lord for the joy of their salvation. In context, the previous chapter spoke about the coming righteous reign of the Messiah. This chapter is the appropriate response to the rule and reign of God through his redeemer. The first two verses of chapter 12 are in the singular form. Salvation, while often thought of at a national level in ancient Israel, is here referred to on an individual level. First, we should note that salvation came from the Lord and we didn't save ourselves. However, we all experienced salvation first at the individual,

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intimate level and then as a corporate community. The prophet does not explain how the anger of the Lord was turned away, but it was nothing we did. It was something God did. And Isaiah declares them to be “excellent things”. The point is that the time of anger has indeed passed and our response is to declare to the earth the glorious deeds of the Lord. The Lord saved us through some action of his own. Thus to declare His deeds of salvation to the world we would need to pay attention to the redemptive saving activity of the Lord. We should become familiar with the redemptive work of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. Not simply with head knowledge of what God has done but at the personal intimate level of what God has done for us! Isaiah ends the song of prophetic praise reminding us that the Lord now dwells in our midst. Another reason to declare His praise!

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13. Some of the early followers of Jesus considered the imminent return of the Messiah as an excuse to withdraw from society and become idle, leading to a passive Christianity. Some members of the community at Thessaloniki perceived the return of Jesus to be so close they simply quit working and waited for the rapture. Paul makes a strong command, “in the name of Jesus”, for us to stay away from such people. This might strike us initially as quite harsh. Perhaps Paul is concerned that idleness and passive Christianity will become infectious and influence others to also become passive. Paul admonishes the Thessalonians who have become overly mesmerized by the “Last Days” to not neglect their responsibilities of everyday life. We still have to be faithful and “never tire of doing good” until the end. The doctrine of immanency should instead inspire the faithful to work all the harder for the coming kingdom. Secular society continues to move further and further away from the values, ethics and morality of the Judaeo-Christian faith. Our response should not be to embrace a passive Christianity that accepts this as normal. We should continue to proclaim the truth and actively live the truth. We cannot be salt and light if we withdraw from society. Society is hopeless and we have hope to share!

Luke 21:5-19. Many of us admire magnificent buildings and appreciate good architecture. The temple in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus was a highly renovated structure originally built by Zerubbabel and Ezra. Herod had poured a great deal of wealth into expanding the temple mount platform, effectively doubling the size of Mount Zion, and adding impressive buildings along the sides. In terms of its grandiose size, the Jerusalem temple area was twice the size of the Athenian Acropolis. Much of the temple was covered in intricate gold relief that created a brilliant effect in the sunlight. As Jesus' disciples are admiring the exquisite architecture, he takes the opportunity to teach about the future messianic age and the calamity to come prior. In the late Second Temple Period, there were opposite schools of thought concerning the nature of the advent of the Messiah. One school taught that the Messiah would come to a generation that was worthy of him, that is to say: Everything will get better and when we are all good enough the Messiah will come to a utopia that is already on earth. Another school of thought taught the opposite, saying that Messiah would come to a generation that was not worthy of him. That is to say: the world will descend into chaos and then the Redeemer will appear,

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bringing utopia with him.¹ Jesus foretells wars, plagues, pestilences, and persecutions that come to both the world in general and to his followers in particular. These are the images of devastation we see in the Revelation to John, implying Messiah returns to a generation that is unfortunately not worthy of him. Jesus prepares his followers, not by hiding the persecution to come but by offering words of hope and encouragement. Jesus tells us not to be terrified of the future and that instead there will be an “opportunity to bear witness” during upheaval. There is a paradox here in which Jesus lets us know some will suffer martyrdom and yet “not a hair of your head will perish”. It's a mystery in which both circumstances can be true in the life of a believer. Jesus encourages us that through enduring (v. 19) this time of suffering there will come a reward, and that reward is life. The word used for *enduring* in the Greek text is ὑπομονή (*hypomoné*) which carries the meanings of being steadfast, patient, and persistent. Jesus encourages us to remain loyal in faith and to continue in piety even during the greatest of trials. The reward that he brings is even greater than death, it is eternal life.

ACNA Readings

Malachi 3:13-4:6. The portion of Malachi opens with some audacious, and dare I say blasphemous, words against God. People are questioning the point of following the commandments of the Lord and see the whole activity as futile and pointless. The wicked seem to prosper, and the good struggle under persecution. Not much appears to have changed after two and half thousand years, and it can be a challenge to declare how the Lord is good when bad things constantly happen. Malachi proclaims that the Lord has not forgotten his people, in fact, he has written them down in a book of remembrance. Redemption was coming to those who remained faithful under pressure and had their names in the book. Malachi declares that the day was coming when all the dark deeds of man would flee before the light of the messianic character called the sun of righteousness. We should not be concerned with vengeance against unrighteousness as that is something the Lord concerns himself with. Malachi instructs us to be concerned with the Torah of Moses, not to forget the commandments of God. One aspect of the redemption is that the Torah of God is also renewed, not forgotten, and as promised in Jeremiah 31 destined to be on the hearts of all people. The commandments of God do not disappear after the coming of the redeemer. Jesus tells us, “If you love me, keep my commandments”.

Coupled with a proclamation concerning the Laws of Moses, Malachi also announces a unique prophecy that Elijah will act as herald of the redeemer. Elijah who was taken alive to heaven returns to fulfil one last role. In the Gospels, John the Baptist is asked if he was Elijah, which he personally denies only to have Jesus confirm that indeed he was the “Elijah to come”. Interestingly the last verses of the Old Testament include both Moses and Elijah who appear at the Transfiguration of the Lord.

¹ See Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 98a for full discussion on the multiple views presented here.

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Psalm 98. This psalm demonstrates the universal nature of salvation that we commonly find in the book of Psalms. The Lord's righteousness and salvation are made known to all the nations of the world. This truth does not diminish the steadfast love and faithfulness God has for his people Israel but acknowledges the kingship of God is over all the earth. This is demonstrated in the way Jewish blessings begin with "*Baruch Atah Adonai Elohenu Melech HaOlam*" (Blessed are you the Lord our God king of the universe. Not the king of Israel!) As part of the future redemption, the psalm declares that the Lord will come to judge the whole earth with righteousness and all the peoples on the earth with equity. This psalm was prayed by Jewish people in the temple in Jerusalem, yet theologically we are seeing that redemption comes to both Jews and Gentiles together. So let all the earth sing loudly and joyfully, salvation has come to all.

About the author. The Rev. Aaron Eime is a deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and a teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master's program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and Hebrew. He has taught internationally, including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.