

Meet the Living, True and Sovereign God

TRINITY 19 – A 2017 – SPRINGLINE PARISH

[Readings: Isaiah 45. 1-7, Psalm 23; Thessalonians 1. 1-10; Matthew 25. 15-22]

ISAIAH 45:1-7¹

¹ This is what the LORD says to **his anointed, to Cyrus**, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armour, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: ² I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. ³ I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, **so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.** ⁴ For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, **I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honour, though you do not acknowledge me.** ⁵ **I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.** I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, ⁶ **so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other.** ⁷ I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; **I, the LORD, do all these things.**

The first reading from the prophet Isaiah aptly reminds us that God is sovereign and almighty. He is able to work even through those who do not know him and that any government may be his agent of good. This was the case with King Cyrus of Persia who was a pagan, a non-Jew, who is used by God to free and restore the Jewish nation.

Let us look at verses 3-6. Note especially in verse one how a foreigner is called “The Lord’s anointed” – “Masiah”, Christ, ‘Christos’) **The Lord was making sure that world history converged upon his designs for a tiny captured group of people, Israel.**

The gospel reading also provides a contrast between the secular and spiritual power.

MATTHEW 22. 15-22 : Paying Taxes to Caesar

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶ They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. Teacher, they said, we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. *You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are.* ¹⁷ Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? ¹⁸ But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for paying the tax. They brought him a denarius, ²⁰ and he asked them, Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription? ²¹ Caesar's, they replied. Then he said to them, Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's. ²² When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

¹ (Cf. The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, Student Edition (Geoffrey Chapman London 1993) pp 337, 665, 774-775)

Verse 16c (see above in italics): The idiom expresses a basic aspect of the biblical idea of justice, in impartiality that refuses to take a bribe and tilts in favour of the poorer litigant. This is the biblical basis for the preferential option for the poor.

Verse 17: To pay meant to acknowledge a foreign pagan sovereignty in Israel.

Verse 18: “Denarius” – a normal day’s wage.

Verse 20: “Inscription”: “Tiberius Caesar son of the divine Augustus, great high priest.” It is neither an encouragement to Zealots nor to discourage Quietists. It accepts the state as it is as the lesser of two evils, the worse being anarchy. **Jesus looked to non-violent change and to the Kingdom of God as soon to come. God’s claim is greater than the state’s.**

This passage is first of four units containing various controversies with the Pharisees, Herodians and Sadducees. Jesus is challenged by religious authorities. **The first reading (OT) and the gospel can be taken together to understand the sovereignty of God that can use secular powers to achieve his goals. His sovereign power, might and love is far greater than that of secular powers even though sometimes secular powers seem to dominate.**

The second reading refers to the Church in Thessalonica, a model Church that is fervent in faith and active in good works. The Thessalonian Church is a model for us today as it was then.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10 : Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' Faith

¹ Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. ² We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. ³ We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia— your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, ⁹ for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead— Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath

This reading is a narration of testimony of the most beautiful and marvellous things that happened in the Church of Thessalonica, how lives have been changed as the Holy Spirit touched them.

Verses 2-3 are significant: Reason for thanks is God.

The reading speaks of the fruitful reception of the gospel by the Thessalonian Christians.

-There is a real Christian ethos of the Thessalonian community and Church. They are active in faith, manifested love and steady hope. A true inspiration for us today as well!

-Their life is one of a dynamic faith: i.e., belief expressed in life; manifested love, i.e., a love expressed in actions that are sometimes difficult; and a steady hope, i.e., a patient expectation of the coming of the Lord Jesus despite the tribulations of the present age.

Verse 4: affection for Thessalonians – 19 times in Thessalonians **the word “adelphos”, “beloved of God” reflects Yahweh’s relationship with Israel and reflects the constancy of God’s love** for us as for the Thessalonians. The love is marked by their reception of the gospel.

Verse 5: **The power of the gospel lies not in his rhetoric but in the power of the Spirit of God.**

Power, Holy Spirit, full force – 3 virtually synonymous expressions: For Paul the proclamation of the gospel is as much an expression of God’s power as is the working of miracles.

Verses 9-10: **a real conversion is a movement from ‘idols’ (false gods, demons) to God.** (Monotheistic movement) God is “living and true” speaks of the fidelity of God and has a Christological and eschatological implication.

WHAT DOES THE WORD OF GOD TEACH US FOR OUR LIVES TODAY?

1. The Thessalonian Church is a model of any and every Church.

It was established through a true conversion from false idols to a living and true God. It was established on active, dynamic faith and manifested love (active love expressed in actions) and steady hope – a patient expectation for the coming of the Lord in spite of the difficulties of this age (now).

2. The Word of God invites us to meet the living, loving, true and sovereign God in our personal and social lives! Our faith in God is the bedrock of our lives!

The readings ought to give us an awe for our God, who can bring good out of even apparent evil, whose sovereignty is bigger and mightier than the might of kings!

Often we have to submit to secular powers but we must acknowledge that God’s sovereignty is greater! Social life requires us to follow secular laws so as to avoid anarchy. The behaviour of Jesus seems to indicate that as long as we are on earth, the secular dimension and spiritual dimension are to be faced as followers and disciples of Christ – as Christians.

In our hearts and in the heart of our nation there must be re-established a space for God based on an awe, fear and worship of God. Social anarchy that results from lack of government is only reflective of the spiritual anarchy and its fearful, disastrous effects in the life of the individual, the nation and the world.

God will not force his way into our lives – we have to let him in. That is faith led by love!

[ST Mattapally]