

Advent Devotional December 20, 2018

Scripture

Isaiah 28:9-22

⁹ “Whom will he teach knowledge,
and to whom will he explain the message?

Those who are weaned from milk,
those taken from the breast?

¹⁰ For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept,
line upon line, line upon line,
here a little, there a little.”

¹¹ Truly, with stammering lip
and with alien tongue

he will speak to this people,

¹² to whom he has said,

“This is rest;

give rest to the weary;

and this is repose”;

yet they would not hear.

¹³ Therefore the word of the LORD will be to them,

“Precept upon precept, precept upon precept,

line upon line, line upon line,

here a little, there a little,”

in order that they may go, and fall backward,

and be broken, and snared, and taken.

¹⁴ Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scoffers

who rule this people in Jerusalem.

¹⁵ Because you have said, “We have made a covenant with death,

and with Sheol we have an agreement;

when the overwhelming scourge passes through

it will not come to us;

for we have made lies our refuge,

and in falsehood we have taken shelter”;

¹⁶ therefore thus says the Lord GOD,

See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone,

a tested stone,

a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation:

“One who trusts will not panic.”

¹⁷ And I will make justice the line,

and righteousness the plummet;

hail will sweep away the refuge of lies,

and waters will overwhelm the shelter.

¹⁸ Then your covenant with death will be annulled,

and your agreement with Sheol will not stand;

when the overwhelming scourge passes through

you will be beaten down by it.

¹⁹ As often as it passes through, it will take you;

for morning by morning it will pass through,

by day and by night;

and it will be sheer terror to understand the message.

²⁰For the bed is too short to stretch oneself on it,
and the covering too narrow to wrap oneself in it.

²¹For the LORD will rise up as on Mount Perazim,
he will rage as in the valley of Gibeon;

to do his deed—strange is his deed!
and to work his work—alien is his work!

²²Now therefore do not scoff,
or your bonds will be made stronger;
for I have heard a decree of destruction
from the Lord GOD of hosts upon the whole land.

Devotional

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It's a bit hackneyed to say we live in confusing and complicated times. Yet what I find striking in this passage is that it is exactly this sentiment that the people of God are using as an excuse: "Whom will he teach knowledge . . . Those who are weaned from milk?" That is, is the prophet speaking to babies? Does Isaiah not realize the problems we're facing—and all he says is, "One who trusts will not panic"? If there is to be a tomorrow, let alone a good one, we must act and make difficult choices.

Yet Isaiah here lays out for Judah God's "alien" plan: God will go against God's people—against those who "have made a covenant with death." God is going against them *so that* a new foundation stone, trust in God, can be laid and justice and righteousness made the standards of this new building.

Advent reminds us of God's alien work that breaks us: In the midst of oppression, God came down as a babe. God lived life as a babe, a toddler, a teenager, then as an adult for a bit. God's alien work took some time—for even through the story of Acts we see that the church lived in the midst of an oppressive empire, in an oppressive world.

The cornerstone upon which justice and righteousness are laid? Trust in a little peasant boy.

Prayer

Lord, as we wait for Christmas, bring us to Holy Saturday, bring us to today. Teach us to wait for your coming. Let it break us, that whether we sit or act, eat or fast, we might hope for it to be in the holiness of your love and justice, of your kingdom. Amen.