

# Politically Dangerous

Proper 19

August 10, 2025

Our Old Testament reading continues our journey through the prophets. In the last few weeks we have heard Amos and Hosea trying to convince the people of the northern kingdom of Israel give up worshipping the gods of the original inhabitants of the area and return to Yahweh, the god of Moses. They failed, and the Assyrians took the Israelites away into captivity.

Now we have Isaiah, speaking to the people of Jerusalem, around 740 years before Christ. They have escaped exile into Assyria, but now it's the Babylonians who are threatening.

The people of Judah claim to have stayed faithful to Yahweh, but Isaiah is telling them that their worship in the temple disgusts their god. They have spent a fortune on the best fattened cattle and sheep for sacrifice, and why? Because after some is taken for God, the rest goes to them, and they can have a luxurious feast on the best meat. This is Jerusalem's 1% he's talking to, people who enjoy the best of the best and put on a great show when they come to worship.

And all this luxury angers God. The money these people wasted on themselves could have been given directly to the Temple and shared with the ones who needed it. And they could have turned from looking after their own self-interests and worked for real justice.

What does God want from them?

Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

Are those comfortable words today, given the condition of the world?

An American preacher I found online was getting nervous about reading this in his congregation. It's too political. They were going to accuse him of being a

socialist.

I'm grateful that we aren't afraid of being called socialists in this country, but I don't think Isaiah's demands make us comfortable.

And then we have Jesus, brought to us by Luke. The three "synoptic" gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are working with essentially the same material, but each has its own unique flavour and a few things that don't appear in the others.

Matthew and Mark were probably Jews, writing for a Jewish audience. Luke seems to have been a Greek-speaking convert. He was better educated. His Greek is more literate. Tradition says he was a physician, maybe travelling with Paul (although experts say his theology was different from Paul's). And he emphasized two things more than the other gospel-writers did.

The first is social justice. Luke is the one who records Mary's song when she learns she is to be the mother of God's son:

In the old language that I love to sing when Vespersong performs, Mary says:

God hath shewed strength with his arm: he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seat: and hath exalted the humble and meek.

He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich he hath sent empty away.

Jesus took after his mother – at least Luke's Jesus did.

Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven.

And there we see another of Luke's interests: the end of time, and the second coming of Christ. When he wrote, at the end of the first century (and there might have been some additions and changes towards the beginning of the second century) the "little flock" of Christians was finding life difficult. The Romans were persecuting Christians off and on, and Christians were being rejected by their families and friends. You couldn't blame them for hoping that God would take

over the world and make things right. Some scholars think that Jesus' teachings in Luke about his second coming were later additions to comfort persecuted followers of Christ.

So how are we to understand this Gospel passage today?

There are lots of little nuggets in it. First, Jesus consoles the faithful few – us now as well as Luke's friends.

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

We will inherit the kingdom, or kindom, whatever that might be. The going might get tough, but we will win.

Then Jesus teaches about radical generosity. It would make sense for someone who believes the world is about to end to sell everything and store up treasure in heaven by displaying astonishing generosity. Our world could still end tomorrow – there are no guarantees that it won't. But we have to be able to look after ourselves, so there has to be some sort of middle way between selling everything and living a life of luxury. Common sense generosity, I would call it. Keeping things in perspective.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

A thing I have noticed about possessions: they tend to take possession of me. If I don't watch out I can be a slave to my house, trying to make it exactly the way I want it. I can be a slave to my hobbies, buying one more fancy add-on to my spinning wheel, one more expensive bag of yarn. And so on.

And then Luke has Jesus talk about his second coming in two ways.

First he is the master who cares for servants who stayed awake to greet him. Consolation for the faithful who have worked long and hard in his service.

Then he is the thief who breaks in sometime in the night, catching a less-prepared householder unawares. Maybe a warning to the rest of us who don't work quite so hard.

Be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Could that be true, even here and now?

I don't think we need to look for a glorious apocalypse with trumpets and angels and people being carried into heaven or sucked into hell.

The end of time is here and now. We are standing at the edge of time. The past is back there, and it has happened. The future hasn't happened yet. It doesn't exist. This is the end of time. Right now. And now. And now. There is nothing saying we will get another now.

And we have to be ready for the Child of Humanity to appear to us, not as a blazing triumphant figure but as someone who can barely hold it together. Someone who is hungry, or a victim of violence, or maybe crazy. Or maybe someone who changes your life with the new way they see things.

We are called to watch for those moments when the deep truth is revealed. And we are called, as Isaiah's people were called, to

Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan,  
plead for the widow.

I feel like that's impossible for someone like me. How can I seek justice when there is so much injustice out there? How can I rescue the oppressed, and all the rest? It feels hopeless. I'm a tired, powerless old woman. What can I do?

That's where for once Paul speaks to me. He reminds his Hebrew friends of people in their heritage who kept on believing in the face of mountains of evidence that they were wrong. If Sarah can trust that she will have a baby when she's far too old for such nonsense, maybe I can trust that the little I can do in the way of working for justice and peace will make a difference somehow.

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Paul speaks to us there. We need faith. We need to trust that we're not dead yet, that we can keep on keeping on making a difference. It's what God wants of us, and so we need to trust that God will give us the power and the strength to do it.

May it be so. Amen.