

God's Eyes  
September 8, 2019  
Isaiah 1:1, 10-20

In 2005, my home church celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Previous pastors flooded in to help with the services for that Sunday. The youth pastor from when I was a very small boy was charged with doing the sermon at the services, and I was one of the liturgists. Unfortunately, he was and still is a little bit of a prankster of sorts. Little did I know that when I signed up for being the liturgist, I also signed up for being the sermon illustration. He is preaching the sermon, and he starts off by giving me a peacock feather. He asks me to balance the feather standing up in the palm of my hand. Once I had one balanced, he gave me three to balance all at once. At some point I will get him back for that, but I can still remember looking up at these feathers, trying to balance them while the pastor makes an example of me.

The one thing I remember from that sermon though (outside of feeling like a circus attraction) was the message of the sermon. Fun fact: the top of a peacock's feather is called "the eye of God," and if you want to balance the feather, you need to look to "the eye," not to the tip. In the same way, if we expect to find balance in life, we need to look to the eye of God. In thinking about this fact a few weeks ago, I had a thought: What do the eyes of God see? When God looks down on God's Creation, does God see justice or injustice? When God looks upon us, is God crying tears of joy or tears of sadness? Are they watching gleefully as we go about our lives, or are they hurting, wanting desperately to look away as they cry out, "No more! I can't watch anymore!"? This thought of "what do God's eyes see" is answered in a way by today's reading, a reading where God puts the recently-exiled Judeans "on trial" so to speak.

Isaiah starts off with referencing Sodom and Gomorrah. As a bit of a refresher, Sodom and Gomorrah were cities Abraham tried to save. Abraham bargained with God that if ten righteous people could be found in Sodom, that the city should be spared. Unfortunately, none were found, because both towns are characterized as the epitome of sinfulness. So, God rained sulfur and fire down upon both cities. Later references to Sodom and Gomorrah are made as warnings of God's wrathfulness and God's judgment. This starting point is a warning to the exiles of just how thoroughly irate God is with God's people. This is letting the people know "You are on trial; tread carefully."

So, we know they're on trial, but what are the charges? We then get God speaking talking about disgust with all the sacrifices, deploring holidays and celebrations, and wanting to ignore the callings of God's children. God even goes so far as to call the offerings "worthless." God is expressing God's utter disgust with the people's "false faith." They offer sacrifices for forgiveness only to go on sinning. They pray for things that are personally beneficial, not *communally* beneficial. They ignore the needs of the downtrodden; the widows, orphans, and oppressed/marginalized. Essentially, they call themselves "Children of God" but they do not fulfill that role in the slightest.

So, their charge is tarnishing the title of "Child of God." What then is their punishment/sentence? This is probably the most interest part. God says, "Come; let us walk and talk; let us work this out" It switches from this "wrathful" accusational tone to a much calmer,

loving tone. Amidst the Judeans not holding up their end of the promises God had previously made to them, God promises renewal/forgiveness, saying:

- “Your wrongdoings are bloodred, but they can be as white as snow.”
- “Your sins are like crimson, but they can be made clean again like new wool.”
- “If you pay attention now and change your ways, you can eat good things from a healthy harvest.”

So, they need to turn from their sinful ways/“clean up your lives,” commit to seeking justice, and make it right for the world’s most vulnerable. However, this is a one-time shot. God says, “If you refuse to listen and stubbornly persist, then, by violence and war, you will be the one devoured.” So, that wrathful tone makes one last encore appearance to really drive home the severity of the charges.

You might be wondering what this has to do with us. This was written 2,500-3,000 years ago to a people long dead. We don’t offer sacrifices anymore. Nothing in this story really seems to apply to us, right? Here’s the kicker: that which the Judeans did that put them on trial is still happening today. People are oppressed because of their race, sex, age, politics, religion, etc. There are people trafficked around like cattle for the enjoyment of others, crying out for justice. There are people seeking asylum/refuge here that are being denied justice/life. There are many children in foster care/adoption agencies without people to take them. There are widows/widowers left unable to support themselves, let alone any children they may have, because they are overlooked. This is only the tip of the iceberg.

In the end, there is much that we turn our eyes from as a nation so that we can pretend that justice is “rolling down like an ever-flowing stream”. God’s eyes though, God cannot look away from what is playing out on Earth. That is one of our greatest challenges as the Body of Christ, as God’s eyes, hands, and mouth in the world: to see the world as God sees it. Don’t get me wrong, there is good in the world that is to be celebrated. However, there is much evil in the world though as well, evil that, once we pay attention to it, we feel the heartbreak God feels as our hearts break, and we feel the burning of God’s tears in our own tears. Like it or not, we are the eyes of God in this world. So, as the eyes of God in the world, I ask you, what do you see?