

## **Sunday 19C 2010**

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

August 8, 2010

[Isaiah 1:1,10-20](#); Occasional

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

*“Come now, and let us reason together.”* That’s from our reading in Isaiah. Actually, our modern translation this morning said: *“Come now, let us argue it out.”* But for 400 years, the King James Version has translated it: *“Come now, and let us reason together.”* In the English-speaking world, this has become a figure of speech. But it is God saying to his people, *“Can we talk?”* And that’s a loaded suggestion. Whatever it is God wants to talk about, I am fairly certain that my reasons aren’t going to stack up to his reasons. My arguments aren’t going to match his.

God wants to talk to his people about social injustice. His people have a temple, where they celebrate holy days in God’s honor, and sacrifice animals in God’s honor. There’s a bunch of ritual. And meanwhile the hungry are not fed. The weak and the disadvantaged are run over. The rich get richer. And the poor get poorer. And God wants to talk about this. Come now, and let us reason together. Why do I get the feeling he is going to win this argument?

*What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.* [I react:] You know, God, you did command us to make those sacrifices. Remember that little thing called the Law of Moses?

*New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation — I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them.* [I react:] Sabbath? You are weary of my keeping the sabbath? Do you remember, God, when you wrote the Ten Commandments?

*Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now, let us argue it out, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.* In Isaiah, God shrugs off the trappings of religion, and demands justice. Social justice. It isn’t right for people to get rich exploiting others, to be stingy and greedy, and then to be religious, saying “God this,” “God that,” light this candle, burn this incense, and sacrifice this goat. Isaiah is one of the four great prophets of social justice, the other three being Amos, Hosea, and Micah. Take care of the poor, or you will be

devoured by the sword. This is the Old Testament God Almighty. His prophets not only preach, but in the case of Elijah, they make war. He means business.

Thank goodness we have the New Testament. Thank goodness sweet Jesus, meek and mild, isn't so harsh. Jesus talks about the "least of these." Jesus says that whenever we help the "least of these," we are helping him. But what else does Jesus say? When we are not helping the "least of these," then we are not helping him. And we are condemned to hell. Jesus said, "*Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me. And these will go away into eternal punishment.*" What happened to Jesus meek and mild and milquetoast? Jesus? Who told the rich young man to sell everything and give the proceeds to the poor? Jesus, who turned over the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple? Jesus, who condemned the religious leaders who devoured the resources of widows? Jesus, who made Zaccheus pay back all of his ill-gotten gains, plus 100%, to all of his victims? Jesus, who quoted the social prophets, saying "*Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'*"

Now, Jesus is more than this. Jesus, in fact, eats with tax collectors and called one tax collector to be one of the twelve disciples. And tax collectors were greedy, foreign collaborators, corrupt, despicable. If you looked up social injustice in the dictionary, it would show a picture of Matthew or Zaccheus or one of the other tax collectors that Jesus kept company with. So Jesus forgives, understands, redeems. He forgives big, understands big, and redeems big. And then he says, "To whom much has been given, much will be required." Jesus says that when you've had your big sins forgiven, your debt to God cancelled, it's time to start showing a little of that forgiveness and cancellation toward others.

I've got two books here, I could easily have brought out ten more. One is called [UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity... And Why It Matters](#). If you want to buy this book or read more about it, go to the website: [UnChristian dot com](#). Another book is called [They Like Jesus, But Not the Church](#). These are books that talk about why people under 30 have given up on the Church. And in large part, these people believe in Jesus. They believe at least that he is a good teacher, maybe more. But they look at what passes for Christianity in America these days, and they see a church that is grabbing for power and money, a church that condemns and takes advantage of the least of these, a church that hates and judges. In other words, a church that in no way, shape, or form resembles its founder. This is all over the news. A best-selling novelist, Anne Rice, gave up on the Church. This week, she said she gave up Christianity, quote, "*in the name of Christ.*" She is now part of the fastest growing religion in the country, according to the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. People who believe in God, but don't believe in religion. She did this on Facebook.

I don't want anyone from Dove of Peace to go on Facebook and say that they quit the Church because we are not like Christ. It's bad enough that the people who don't know us just assume that we are bigots, judgmental, and hypocritical. It's not enough to be following Jesus. We have to let others know that we follow Jesus, simply because they will assume that we don't. That seems to be the definition of the Church. Look up unChristian in the dictionary, and you'll see a

picture of a church.

[Our Vision Team has laid out eight essential areas of this congregation's life.](#) Several of them are aimed at letting the world know who we are, and more importantly, who we are not. We're not Pat Robertson or Ralph Reed or people who carry picket signs that begin with the words "God hates." We are going to particularly work hard on taking care of God's creation, on welcoming diverse types of people, on emphasizing partnership with the community and with people of different denominations, and not least, ministering with the ones that Jesus called the "least of these."

This has all happened before. Isaiah of Jerusalem was talking about this same problem more than 600 years before Jesus was born. Religion which worships a merciful and just God becomes something other than merciful and just. In Isaiah's time, it was complacent, smug, and hypocritical. Now, two thousand six hundred years later, churches have been discovered to be complacent, smug, and hypocritical. Somehow, God still puts up with us, and uses us in spite of ourselves.

*"Come now, and let us reason together."* We are still the people of God, and we still are his prophets, his angels, and his ambassadors. Rather than giving up on us, he still summons us back to him: *"Come now, and let us reason together."* Let us strive to be worthy of the one who calls us. Let us be called Christians because we are like Christ. Let us honor his name with our actions. *"Come now, and let us reason together."* Amen.