



Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, August 17, 2025 – Triple Reprimand Allegory

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene, ID
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[Isaiah 5:1-7, Psalm 80:1-2, 8-18, Hebrews 11:29-12:2, Luke 12:49-56](#)

God be in my head, and in my understanding. God be in my heart, and in my thinking.
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking. Amen.

This Sunday the Revised Common Lectionary [RCL] reminded me of a technique I learned from a wise professor. His advice was, "Tell them what you are going to say. Say it! Then tell them what you said. Maybe something will stick." My friends, hear then a triple reprimand from the RCL.

First – a little biblical history. After the death of Solomon,¹ Israel was divided into the Northern Kingdom (called Israel). Israel was overtaken by the Assyrian Empire.² Jerusalem was the capital of the southern kingdom, Judah, which, according to the Oxford Annotated Bible, "lived uneasily in the shadow" of occupied Israel.

Bart Ehrman³ calls the book of Isaiah, "one of the most important books of the Hebrew Bible for understanding ancient Israel and later Christianity."⁴ Isaiah was a prophet to Judah for more than 40 years,⁵ during the reigns of 4 kings.⁶ To those rulers, and to the people of Judah, Isaiah preached against idolatry and social injustice, always warning them what the consequences of their actions would bring. They didn't listen, not even to this allegory⁷ that is today's OT lesson.

Someone (could it be God?) planted a vineyard and made certain the vineyard had everything necessary for success. Those carefully selected and planted "choice vines" ("soreq" in Hebrew) are a variety of red wine grape native to the Soreq Valley, west of Jerusalem. Could those vines represent God's children? The vines should have produced the best grapes for wine making, but produced wild grapes instead.

If the reading from Isaiah is not yet clear-enough, the vineyard owner asks the people of Judah to "judge between me and my vineyard." Hasn't the owner done everything he could to ensure its success? Who has failed? Not the vineyard planter who vows to destroy and neglect the vineyard. No more subtlety – The Lord of Hosts says, "Take THAT, all you who ignore my commandments and do not do what is right!"

Psalm 80 is a "group lament" and a "plea for deliverance." It pairs beautifully with the OT, revisiting the Israelites' exodus from Egypt and asking God to save them again. I think the RCL should not have omitted verses 3-7, and here they are: ³Restore us, O

¹ ~931 BCE

² 2Kings, Ch 17

³ Wheaton College (BA); Princeton Theological Seminary (MDiv, PhD)

⁴ <https://ehrmanblog.org/the-message-of-first-isaiah/>

⁵ 742-701 (some believe until 687) BC

⁶ Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah

⁷ A story that can be interpreted to reveal hidden meaning.

God; let your face shine, that we may be saved. ⁴ O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? ⁵ You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure. ⁶ You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves. ⁷ Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved."

Notice that they blame God for the trouble they are in. The ancient peoples were not different from us. We make mistakes and do things that hurt other people and do damage to ourselves and to relationships. OK -- Let's just call those things "sins." We "fall into sin." That's a euphemism too. Falling is usually an accident. Sometimes we dive in to sin!

It reminds me of the German Shorthaired Pointer that came bounding into our front yard one day when we were still living in deep east Texas. The "puppy" was wearing an electronic collar and he really wanted to play with the boys, and to their delight, he did while I called the phone number on his tag. Barney's owner arrived much too soon for Chris and his friend! The man was apologetic. "I'm sorry, Ma'am." He said, shaking his head. "We put in an electronic fence to keep him on our property. He knows it's gonna hurt a little when he crosses that line, but he's a big boy, and he don't care!"

Whether immediate or delayed, there are consequences for our actions, visible and invisible. Sometimes we recognize and acknowledge our sins. Sometimes we say "Sorry!" maybe apologize, maybe try to make amends, maybe ask forgiveness from those we've harmed. Maybe we only ask God for forgiveness and let the guilt live in our head rent-free. To truly "repent" means to "turn" and go a 'better' way, to change your heart.

The Apostle Paul is a dramatic example of 180° repentance. Until his blinding conversion on the road to Damascus, he had been a violent persecutor of Jesus' followers. A generation after Paul, this letter to the Hebrews may have been written by one of his "unknown disciples" to a congregation on the verge of "losing their faith."

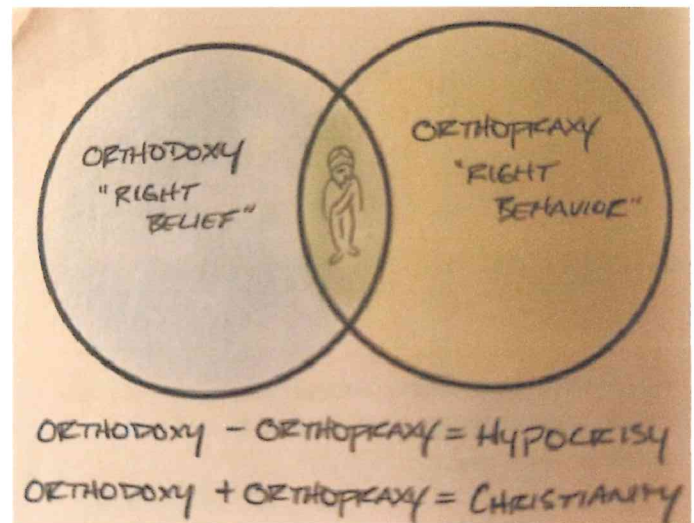
The letter begins, as did Psalm 80, by recounting a few of God's miracles that had saved the Hebrew people. The author's list of heroic characters is only a sampling of faithful ones who, trusting in God, persevered in spite of danger; many of them "unto death," and struggled, as we do today, with doubt, pride, and other human weaknesses.

The writer continues with graphic descriptions of violence against believers in Jesus who were persecuted for their faith. They are "a cloud of witnesses." Jesus, our primary example, "endured the cross... and has taken his place at the right hand of the throne of God." Or as it is written in The Message, "When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility Jesus plowed through. *That* will shoot adrenaline into your souls!"

The Gospel reading today does not feature the Jesus who healed, comforted and encouraged followers, saying things like, “do not fear,” and “do not worry,” Even Jesus is entitled to his moments. He cursed the fig tree; overturned the tables of the money changers. “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” “Fire” is a metaphor with positive and negative connotations: warmth, passion, desire, transformation; anger, destruction, crisis. Fire in the belly? “I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!” Baptism by fire? “Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!” And so it was even before Jesus’ time – and continues today. People can be divided by many things. I learned at an early age that religion, politics, money, [and intimate relations] are not supposed to be discussed in ‘polite’ company!

Jesus uses the word “hypocrite” 17 times in the New Testament, most directed toward religious leaders, particularly the Pharisees.⁸

I recommend to you a little book, **What if Jesus was Serious?**⁹ complete with references from scripture, graphs, charts, cartoons, and Venn diagrams with equations. I’m particularly fond of this graphic for hypocrisy:



I have been in favor of agreeing to disagree, but recently have come to believe we can do much better than that! Love God. Love your Neighbor (i.e. Everyone). Strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being. *I will, with God’s help.*

Here is a link to learn more about The Dignity Index: <https://www.dignity.us/>

May the power of God surround us, the love of Jesus enfold us; and the fire of the Holy Spirit burn in our hearts and shine forth in our lives. Amen.

⁸ Matthew: 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5; 15:7; 22:18; 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; 24:51; Mark: 7:6; Luke: 6:42; 12:56; 13:15.

⁹ Skye Jethani, subtitled: A Visual Guide to the Teachings of Jesus we Love to Ignore, Moody Publishers, 2020.