

“I Rebuke You and Lay Charges Before You!”

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Scripture (NRSV):

Psalm 50

- ¹The mighty one, God the Lord,
speaks and summons the earth
from the rising of the sun to its setting.
- ²Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God shines forth.
- ³Our God comes and does not keep silence,
before the Lord is a devouring fire,
and a mighty tempest all around.
- ⁴God calls to the heavens above
and to the earth, that God may judge all people:
- ⁵“Gather to me my faithful ones,
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!”
- ⁶The heavens declare God’s righteousness,
for God is judge.
- ⁷“Hear, O my people, and I will speak,
O Israel, I will testify against you.
I am God, your God.
- ⁸Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;
your burnt offerings are continually before me.
- ⁹But I will not accept a bull from your house,
or goats from your folds.
- ¹⁰For every wild animal of the forest is mine,
the cattle on a thousand hills.
- ¹¹I know all the birds of the air,^[a]
and all that moves in the field is mine.

- 12 “If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
for the world and all that is in it is mine.
- 13 Do I eat the flesh of bulls,
or drink the blood of goats?
- 14 Then offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,^[b]
and pay your vows to the Most High.
- 15 Call on me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”
- 16 But to the wicked God says:
“What right have you to recite my statutes,
or take my covenant on your lips?
- 17 For you hate discipline,
and you cast my words behind you.
- 18 You make friends with a thief when you see one,
and you keep company with adulterers.
- 19 “You give your mouth free rein for evil,
and your tongue frames deceit.
- 20 You sit and speak against your kin;
you slander your own mother’s child.
- 21 These things you have done and I have been silent;
you thought that I was one just like yourself.
But now I rebuke you, and lay the charge before you.
- 22 “Mark this, then, you who forget God,
or I will tear you apart, and there will be no one to deliver.
- 23 Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me;
to those who go the right way^[c]
I will show the salvation of God.”

Sermon:

I’d like to begin with words from the writer Rachel Held Evans:

“If you are looking for Bible verses with which to support slavery, you will find them. If you are looking for verses with which to abolish slavery, you will find them. If you are looking for verses with which to oppress women, you will find them. If you are looking for verses

with which to honor and celebrate women, you will find them. If you are looking for reasons to wage war, there are plenty. If you are looking for reasons to promote peace, there are plenty more. If you are looking for an outdated and ancient text, that's exactly what you will find. If you are looking for truth, that's exactly what you will find. This is why there are times when the most instructive question to bring to the text is not, *What does it say? But, What am I looking for?*

I went to the lectionary texts for this Sunday, after horrific days of mass slaughter, and the burn of anger, and the pain of the deep suffering of the lost people in Dayton, in El Paso, in Gilroy. Furious over the ICE roundup in Mississippi, and the children abandoned there. Anxious over the "lost pod" of orcas in South Puget Sound, as reports came out of starved dead orcas washing ashore. Everywhere I looked, there was suffering.

I was upset. I was angry at the NRA, the US government, white supremacists, high school students and counselors who didn't pass on the information about a seriously angry and unhealthy young man, people who create violent video games, people who sell weapons of war on the streets of America, people who inflame with hateful rhetoric... I was mad at a lot of different people.

And what did I find? Isaiah speaking of God's anger; God's displeasure, and psalm 50, also speaking of God's disdain for people who "say their prayers" but are violent and corrupt and cruel.

I found texts that matched my mood. I wanted a message of warning, and of punishment. When my son was younger, he loved the idea of a god who would "smite his enemies". Yup, Nick would go around talking about "smiting his enemies" and "wreaking vengeance" upon them. The family would laugh and we'd all say we were grateful Nick was not God!

I wanted lots of warning against the wicked and unjust. I wanted to know that God saw, and heard, and was as angry over the senseless slaughter, as I was.

In Isaiah we hear, "I will not listen to your prayers, your hands are full of blood".

In Psalm 50 we hear: ¹⁹"You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit. ²⁰You sit and speak against your kin; you slander your own mother's child.

²¹ These things you have done and I have been silent; you thought that I was one just like yourself. But now I rebuke you, and lay the charge before you.

²² Mark this, then, you who forget God, or I will tear you apart, and there will be no one to deliver.”

I really, really wanted an **Almighty Rebuke** against the murderers, the bigots, the violent haters. I wanted them to fear the One God who says, “Mark this, you who forget God, I will tear you apart, and there will be no saving you.”

Yes, what you are looking for, you can find, within Hebrew and Christian scripture.

I was looking for God the Smiter, and I found that God.

Because it felt as if our suffering was unbearable, and we had to push back and shout, “Do something!” “Smite them.” “Stop this hell.”

But then, I found this passage among our Lectionary choices as well:

“Little flock, have no fear, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”
(Luke 12:32)

And this: ²⁹ And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. ³⁰ For...your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well..” (Luke 12:29-30).

And this: ³⁵ “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶ be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. (Luke 12:35-36.

And this:³⁹ “But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰ You must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. (Luke 12:39-40).”

It is “God’s good pleasure”! And “don’t keep worrying”. And “stay alert, be dressed for action”. God will come like a thief...(which is scary, actually). The Son of Man will come when the Son of Man will come, so there is no time in our lives when we cannot be striving for the Kingdom.

The bigots and the haters may think they can wait for another day to turn from hate and violence: maybe, maybe not. The Son of Man will come at an unknown moment, and the judgement of all things will not wait.

We are to be active, and fearless, filled with hope and anticipation...NOW.

We are assured of the good pleasure of God, we do not need to be afraid or worry. Not even NOW.

What was I looking for, as I opened the scriptures this past week?

That which my heart needed.

- In despair I started with angry thoughts of vengeance and “smiting”!
- But reassurance, and the challenge to trust, to continue my life in such a way that it is a source of hope and encouragement for others...this became the message my ears and my heart heard.

What do you want to hear? What are you listening for, when you come to this place?

What does Scripture say to you today? What do you need it to say?