
Meditation on Isaiah 1:16-20

'Learn to Do Good'

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [Phil 1,2] Amen.

∴ ONE ∴

My dear sisters and brothers,

Pastor Heidemarie Klingenberg was thought to give the meditation this morning – with me leading worship. But sadly, she suffers from a Covid infection. So, I took over as the preacher and Rino thankfully stepped in as the worship leader.

As was the case over the last couple of weeks, today again we are accompanied by one of the Old Testament or *First Testament* Prophets.

If you were here that Sunday you will surely remember Isaiah's prophetic vision of the potter. *Trusting the potter: We are clay, he is the potter.*

If you were here that Sunday you will maybe also remember Elisha's prophetic command to Naaman:

Wash and be cleansed!

Today again we will hear from Isaiah, and again about cleansing. But we will hear about a next step, that we as God's people are to take.

::: TWO :::

Hear words from the book of Isaiah, chapter one, on from verse 16:

*¹⁶ Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,*

If you have ever worked on a car or motorcycle, or if you have ever worked with printing ink, if you have ever done intensive garden work, or if you have worked in a mine,

you will surely know how it feels to be really dirty. And you may know, how hard the cleaning is.

Cleansing then is not about a quick shower or a cat lick.

Isaiah says: If we want to change – as human beings – it starts with cleaning. And it might not be done with a once for all time cleaning.

Have we learned to live in violent, neglecting, disregarding, unjust, insulting, altogether destructive ways – it will take us time stop this.

But through Isiah's words, God calls his people to cease to do evil, to step out of destructive behaviour and routines.

::: THREE :::

And as we cease to do evil, Isaiah says:
“Learn to do good!”

*¹⁷ learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.*

“Learn to do good!”

Examples are given:

- *seek justice,*
- *rescue the oppressed,*

- *defend the orphan,*
- *plead for the widow.*

Justice means that everyone is to be treated equally – following John Rawls and his Theory of Justice it could be phrased: We act among others if they for us were behind a veil of ignorance. And the least favoured need to get their just share first because they suffer the most.

Justice means that everyone gets what is just for them.

Justice then could mean that, if you have everything for live, you are not to receive any more, but you become the generous giver.

Rescue the oppressed.

Those with their feet on solid ground are to rescue those, whose ground is constantly swept away – by fate or others malicious actions.

Defend the orphan,
defend those who are defenceless against the hardships of life.

Plead for the widow.

Plead for those who have no power, no voice, or opportunity to plead for themselves.

So, learn to do good.

In every moment of encounter, look for the good you can do towards the person next to you, your neighbour – it may be your partner, child, friend or even opponent or enemy.

No, this is not easy. Therefore, we have to learn it, train it, exercise it, become live long learners in doing good.

And when we stumble, fall, do evil again, we can be washed again, freed from the dirt on our hands and hearts...

and continue our path of learning to do good, until we are experts, until we have grasped Christian perfection.

::: FOUR :::

Isaiah continues:

*¹⁸ 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.*

“Come now, let us argue it out.”

“Come now, let us settle the matter.” (NIV)

God wants to bring the pending situation between evil doing and well doing to an end.

And he wants to bring it to a positive end.

Once something is coloured in deep, blood like red, how could it ever become white again.

But what seems humanly impossible, is in God’s power. And *he* is willing to forgive.

∴ FIVE ∴

Isaiah, to the conclusion:

[The Lord says:]

¹⁹ *If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land;*

²⁰ *but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be devoured by the sword;
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.*

Who would not like to eat the good of the land when it is offered to them?

God offers the good to us. And we can learn to want and do the good.

God has always acted towards the good of his creation and his creatures.

God has continued to act towards the good and always will.

The theologian John N. Oswald writes:

“God forgives and cleanses not because he must, but because he wishes to and has made a way for that to be done through the death and resurrection of Christ.” (John N. Oswald: Isaiah 1-39, NICOT)

God makes a way for us.

We can cease to do evil and learn to do good.

God is even willing to change our dispositions, our hearts and minds.

We can open up our hearts and mind and let God’s spirit reign in us.

And what could be a better opportunity for cleansing and a new beginning, for opening up to God’s acting within us, than celebrating the eucharist, the communion at his table. Amen.