

**Sermon: 2019/08/11 (9th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C) - *Isaiah* 1:1,10-20; *Psalm* 59:1-8,23-24; *Hebrews* 11:1-3,8-16; &, *Luke* 12:32-40\_BTR**

[Invite children to the front. Have torch and a clay oil-lamp ready, and matches.]

In the kitchen at my house, on the shelf to the right, beneath the bench as you enter through the archway, is a torch.

*This* torch, in fact.

You can't normally see it.

It lives, "hidden" behind the leg.

But it is *always* there.

Why?

In case the lights go out!

At night, or during a bad storm.

Because that can happen, can't it?

It's called a "black out."

(There was a *really* big one recently in New York City.[n.1])

And what happens in the dark?

Well, accidents are more likely to happen aren't they?

You can't see where to put your feet, and you trip over things and fall.

You "bump" into other people, and get injured.

Which is why it is best to be prepared - and have something like a torch handy.

Now in Jesus' day, however, when He was on earth, there was, of course, no electricity (yet).

No batteries.

So, instead, they would use *oil lamps*.

(Here's one I made.)

And one day Jesus told a parable about a man who went out to a wedding.

Have you ever been to a wedding?

They are *lots* fun: people eat and dance and laugh, and, often, they don't finish until very late at night.

Well, in His parable, Jesus tells us that this is what happened: the wedding was lots of fun and didn't finish until after the sun had gone down, and that's when the man came back to his house.

And the *good* servants could see him coming because, *even though it was dark*, they had kept their lamps burning.

And this is a symbol for us.  
Oil was expensive, you see.  
Many people - *bad* servants - would have blown out their lamps to stop them burning, and gone to bed.  
But *we* must *keep* on listening to Jesus and copying Him *even* when it is costly and tiring.

Let us pray: ...

[Dismiss children.]

Amos' and Hosea's shared prediction that the prosperity of the Northern Kingdom "Israel" wouldn't last, and that the Israelites' *worldly* success wouldn't, in fact, confer security on the realm, but, *paradoxically*, would attract *powerful* "predators," came true.

It came true in the most violent and appalling way:  
Just as the prophets had seen in their God-given visions, the young Assyrian empire (in what us today Iraq) came to help itself to its little neighbour's 'possessions' [Lk. 12:32]. [See: Hos. 9:3, 10:6, 11:5]

Like 'locusts' the Assyrian armies came, [Am. 7:1] marching over the great, hot deserts of Mesopotamia.  
After all, why continue to buy from Israel when they could simply *take* from her? Like "candy from a baby:"  
The 'military technology [of Assyria] was the most advanced in the world in the first millennium'; [n.2]  
they had exotic siege weapons for which the cities in the "Holy Land" were *completely* unprepared.  
And *sooo* (!) many soldiers, [n.3] that they could choke those cities off from the countryside, turning them into, effectively, desperate, open-air prisons.  
I've seen this in the British Museum in London: ancient stone artwork commemorating those sieges, and the massacres and the widespread enslavements that followed.

Now, initially, the northern kings had tried to buy the Assyrians off.  
This is even mentioned, with some embarrassment, in the Old Testament, in the books of *2 Kings* [15:19] and *1 Chronicles* [5:26].  
But, as *everybody knows* (!), showing weakness to a bully only invites further aggression.  
And when he came for the last time, this "bully" was the emperor "Sargon" (- which is such a wonderfully supervillan name, I think). [n.4]

Sargon (the 1st) of Assyria stripped the "Chosen People" from their homes.

The deportations were massive and ruthless.

And he replaced them with deportees from elsewhere in his vast, multi-ethnic domain. [n.5]

Almost ten, *whole* tribes of the twelve we call, "Hebrews" - who had been settled in the land since the time of Moses and Joshua, were gone.

And most were *never* seen again.

This was ethnic cleansing like Bosnia or Armenia.

And where they had been was a brand new country to which was given the name, 'Samirina'.

(In English, "Samaria.") [n.6]

And *this* was the situation when, as we just heard, that 'Isaiah son of Amoz' - notice the "z" as opposed to an "s"- was called to warn 'Judah and Jerusalem': [Is. 1:1].

"Warn" them of what, exactly?

That the fate of their coreligionists "up there" could happen to them too, down in the south. [Pause.]

Has a beloved neighbor or friend of yours ever moved home?

Someone who lived near you for years and years, and then they left?

Taking their furniture, of course, and everything else.

And, looking through the windows at those familiar but now empty, *hollow* rooms, how did it feel?

It's weird, isn't it?

The word I'd use is, *eerie*.

Or, *creepy*.

Unnerving.

Well, that's how it was for the people of Judah.

A *real* shock.

And, reading between the lines, it seems very clear that they responded to this "eerie," "creepy" situation by, it seems, looking *even more* to their religious rituals in *the* Temple on Mt Zion.

And they comforted themselves - *deluded* themselves - by saying, "It was because those (other) Israelites built alternative temples at Dan and Bethel that God destroyed them.

And if we just really, you know, "step it up" - with our sacrifices and our incense and our chanting, then we'll be fine, right?"

But what is 'the word of the Lord' that Isaiah brings?

*No!*

That's crazy.

'I have had *enough* of [your] burnt offerings,' He says. '...[And now] you shall be devoured by the sword...[too]'. [Is. 1:11, 20].

Not right away; and not by the Assyrians.

But, eventually.

Why?

Because of, and I quote, 'the evil of your doings': [v.16].

Violence *begets* violence, right?

Cruelty and dishonesty and gossip "breeds" more of the same.

And going to church to sing some hymns isn't some silver bullet, when "*divorced*" from what (else) we're doing 24/7.

What Isaiah prophesied, in other words, is *still* true.

At a national level.

And on a personal level:

Your life now - *and its (final, posthumous) outcome* - will be a catastrophe if your focus - as a Christian; if the summation of how you express that self-identification is on *ritual*; on *occasional* attendance at a "house of worship."

To have faith, is to be *faith-ful* - in every aspect, with every word and thought.

That's the standard - the 'treasure' [Lk. 12:33] - that our Savior says we're supposed to seek *continually* after.

Let's take a moment to reflect.

#### Footnotes:

1. See: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/07/13/new-york-city-power-outage-blackout-electricity/1727313001/>, (accessed August 9, 2019).
2. Powell, John (2002), *Weapons & Warfare: Volume I - Ancient and medieval weapons and warfare (to 1500)*, Pasadena, C. A.: Salem Press, 165.
3. 'The Assyrian army of the eighth century B. C. was comprised of at least 150,000 to 200,00 men and was the largest standing military force that the Middle East had witnessed to this time. ... When arrayed for battle the army took up an area of 2,500 yards across and 100 yards deep.' (Gabriel, Richard A. and Metz, Karen S. (1991), *From Sumer to Rome: The Military Capabilities of Ancient Armies*, Westport. C. T.: Greenwood Press, 21.)
4. See: Mitchell, T. C. (2006), 'Israel and Judah from the Coming of Assyrian Domination until the Fall of Samaria, and the Struggle for Independence in Judah (c. 750-700 B. C.)', in Boardman, John; Edwards, I. E. S.; Hammon, N. G. L.; Sollberger, E.; and Walker, C. B. F. (Eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History: Volume III - Part 2: The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and other States of*

*the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B. C.*, Second Edition,  
Cambridge, U. K.: Cambridge University Press, pp. 322-460, 340-341.

5. *Ibid.*, 342.

6. *Supra.*