

Isaiah is giving a clarion call to an outwardly pious and religious community who fasted and prayed, and seemingly delighted in God's ways.

**Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins.**

But despite their religious observances, the Lord calls them out on their rebellion and sin.

And "Rebellion" and "sins" are shocking words for them to hear.

After all, they delight in their religious practices.

But the prophetic voice indicts them for merely keeping up appearances:

**Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways,** as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;

They were going through the motions of a perfect Jewish faith.

Yet they oppress their workers, and the community is full of social and economic issues.

People are looking out for their own interests while practicing their religion, hoping for God to notice their religiosity and bestow blessings or favor.

They exhibit a form of godliness that is lacking in substance and transformation, and God is not impressed.

They want God to notice their worship, yet they do not notice what is wrong before their very eyes.

Economic disparity and unequal opportunities stemming from the period of exile have progressively polarized the community, creating strife, exploitation, abuse, and oppression.

God called Israel to be "priests to the nations" – to, in essence, show the nations how to be a just and loving nation.

Isaiah disrupts the status quo of politics and religion, calling out Israel for their individual piety while turning a blind eye to economic and social disparity.

This Isaiah text informs our Fifth conference priority.

Disrupting and Dismantling Racism and Discrimination.

**We will acknowledge the areas where we need guidance in order to be a voice that speaks up for what is right and against what is wrong. This will help us live into becoming God's Beloved Community where everyone belongs.**

They are words that are infused throughout Isaiah and the rest of the Bible and yet putting

those words into work are hard and honestly,  
we all struggle to find our place in the story of others not like us.

But avoiding this sacred work of disrupting and dismantling  
leaves in place a status quo that discriminates  
against and injures many of God's children.  
This was the message Isaiah "shouted out"  
to leaders as they returned from exile and  
prepared to reestablish Israel.  
He warned them not to get sucked in to shallow  
religion focused on individual piety  
while ignoring social and economic realities.

In the end, Isaiah pleads with Israel  
to embrace their calling – to be signs of God's order.  
He promises that when they do, "...you will be like a watered garden, like a spring of water  
whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations  
of many generations."

Today we are honored to have Sherrie Cavin with us from our Conference Anti Racism Coalition  
to share her story of awakening to racism...You might hear some things that challenge you or  
convict you or perhaps you don't agree with just as prophets or Jesus often said. But being open  
to listening to others different stories enable us to be community together and consider what  
the Holy Spirit might be saying to each of us.

The concerns of Isaiah also appear throughout scripture.

Like in Matthew 25, where Jesus tells  
His disciples a parable with a similar twist.  
The point of the parable is simple and clear:  
the King will judge us based on our  
caring service in the face of human need.  
The picture is painted sharply in black and white.

All people fall into one of two classes...symbolically, sheep and goats.  
The sheep, identified as the righteous are given the right hand,  
which was the place of power and honor.  
But, when it comes to people at the end of time,  
how is this distinction made.  
What did the righteous do to be called righteous?  
By taking care of the needs of others,  
protecting the vulnerable, and attending to the whole community.

And you'll also notice that Jesus equates our acts of kindness on behalf of those in need around us as acts of kindness given to Him.

**Jesus used these images to describe two different groups**

based on how well they served those who were in need around them.

He said that the sheep were those who saw the needy around them and responded to their needs in acts of loving service.

The goats, on the other hand, were those who also saw the needs around them, but failed to act to alleviate the suffering they witnessed.

As a result of their decisions, each was accorded what was due them — to the sheep was given great reward; to the goats a harsh judgment.

And here is really the key to the whole story. Ready?

**The righteous are surprised by the significance of their actions.**

They could not recall ever having helped the King in His moment of distress.

But also note the surprise of the goats, who could not recall ever having passed by the King in His distress.

But neither the sheep nor the goats are surprised at the place the King assigns them... they are surprised at the reason the King gives.

Why? Neither the sheep nor the goats had ever equated the hungry and the homeless with the King. All they saw was either the suffering who needed help and acted compassionately toward them or the "rabble" just looking for a handout and turned the other way, believing that their plight was what they deserved.

**Jesus called the church to be a Beloved Community**

where the dividing walls of hostility are broken down and where the most vulnerable are central to the life of the community. Jesus confronts the nations for failing to respond to those on the economic and social margins —

making it clear this is a failure to love him.  
According to Matthew 25, not doing so  
means calling Jesus "Lord" while  
failing to know, love, and truly follow Him.

Isaiah and Jesus plead with the nations  
and the church to bear witness to a social order  
based on love, focused on healing the breach  
and restoring the oppressed and most vulnerable.  
Why disrupt and dismantle racism and discrimination?  
Because our church and world are crying out  
for springs of water and the restoration of  
God's true beloved Community for all.

**And to remember it isn't our job to separate the sheep and the goats.**

Jesus tells us that is his job and his alone.

And I don't know how this looks as a white male  
who has never faced what some of my friends of color have.

**But I am reminded of the words of MLK Jr where he shared a dream.**

Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

May we all strive to continue to make that dream a reality.