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Samuel I. Koshiishi

The very stern word of Isaiah to impeach against Kings of Judah, especially the expression “Your hands are full of blood” reminds me some scenes of Rwanda where recently I visited as a member of Anglican Peace and Justice Network. There nearly one million people were murdered and in most of cases were with physical blood shed. It is needless to say, the thing that Prophet Isaiah mentioned was completely different from the recent Genocide in Rwanda. However, there seems to be some commonality in these two stories, especially concerning to their sense of value.

Through the mouth of Isaiah the God of Israel expressed so clearly not to receive sacrifices that the King of Judah offered. Why He was not to receive them? He has commanded the king to “to learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” This commandment must be a part of stipulations of the Covenant made between Yahweh and the people of Israel. This particular stipulation signifies that in Israel the powerless should be well taken care and their leaders should prioritize that as their responsibility. Does it contradict to offer sacrifice to Yahweh?

Offering “the multitude of sacrifices” to God at a glance seems to be quite faithful. However, in many cases, offering more than enough gifts to someone resembles to bring tribute. In the case of tribute, just as the case of bribery, receiving reward is the hidden agenda of the one who brings. It is a deal, but not faithful worship. Kings of Judah might ask God to protect independence of their country from the aggression of great foreign powers. It means that the kings paid more attention to the powerful than to the powerless. Thus, Yahweh’s rejection of sacrifice kings of Judah offered is to reject the system of tribute as a whole which asks to give our attention more to the powerful.

In spite of his stern criticism, he also gives us strong hope when he says, “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson,

they shall become like wool.” Of course a condition is attached for that as “but if you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land.” What should we do to be willing and obedient?

What is being willing and obedient is showed in Jesus in the narrative in the Gospel chosen for today. Zacchaeus, a hero of the story besides Jesus, was a traitor for Jews in those days as you all know well. The people seem to hate him for he had power that they should obey not because of his own but using Rome as a shield. It means that everybody knows that Zacchaeus is powerless as a person. Possibly, the expressions like “he was small in stature” and sycamore tree he climbed may suggest this. However, all that people do is to hate him and to blame him. Their enmity may make them overlook the reality that in essence Zacchaeus is powerless. If he was medium in stature which might mean that he was born and raised in an average family just as those who hated him, he would not necessary to climb poor tree to look down the people and to take hated job.

Although it is not written in the Gospel, Jesus had pity on (spragxnizomai) him. Then, what Jesus did was to call on him, ask him to stand on the ground and stay with him on that night despite all the noise of the blame of the people. What Jesus did with Zacchaeus not only made him repent, but also revealed unjust structure of the society in which there were the blaming rich and the blamed poor.

The world where we live has become more complicated than the one of the time of Jesus. However, the message of Isaiah and Luke may show us what Christians should do so clearly. That is, always try to figure out who is the powerless and “plead for them.” Although we are weak and often our hands are full of blood, isn’t it the way to follow foot steps of Jesus to stare at the powerless and plead for them with the hope that our sins as scarlet shall be like snow and our sins as red shall be like wool?