

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Third Sunday of Lent

24 March 2019

“What Is the Nature of His Game?”

Hebrew Scripture: Isaiah 55:1-9

Christian Scripture: Luke 13:1-9



Please listen to and watch the following video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GgnClrx8N2k>

Sympathy for the Devil

[The Rolling Stones](#)

Please allow me to introduce myself
I'm a man of wealth and taste
I've been around for a long, long year
Stole many a man's soul to waste

And I was 'round when Jesus Christ
Had his moment of doubt and pain
Made damn sure that Pilate
Washed his hands and sealed his fate

Pleased to meet you
Hope you guess my name
But what's puzzling you
Is the nature of my game

I stuck around St. Petersburg
When I saw it was a time for a change

Killed the czar and his ministers
Anastasia screamed in vain

I rode a tank
Held a general's rank
When the blitzkrieg raged
And the bodies stank

Pleased to meet you
Hope you guess my name, oh yeah
Ah, what's puzzling you
Is the nature of my game, oh yeah

I watched with glee
While your kings and queens
Fought for ten decades
For the gods they made

I shouted out
Who killed the Kennedys?
When after all
It was you and me

Let me please introduce myself
I'm a man of wealth and taste
And I laid traps for troubadours
Who get killed before they reached Bombay

Pleased to meet you
Hope you guessed my name, oh yeah
But what's puzzling you
Is the nature of my game, oh yeah, get down, baby

Pleased to meet you
Hope you guessed my name, oh yeah
But what's confusing you
Is just the nature of my game, mm yeah

Just as every cop is a criminal
And all the sinners saints
As heads is tails
Just call me Lucifer
'Cause I'm in need of some restraint

So if you meet me
Have some courtesy
Have some sympathy, and some taste
Use all your well-learned politesse
Or I'll lay your soul to waste, mm yeah

Pleased to meet you
Hope you guessed my name, mm yeah

But what's puzzling you
Is the nature of my game, mm mean it, get down

Oh yeah, get on down
Oh yeah

Oh yeah

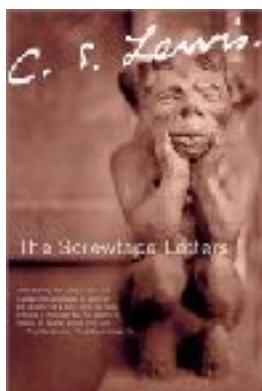
Tell me baby, what's my name
Tell me honey, can ya guess my name
Tell me baby, what's my name
I tell you one time, you're to blame

Oh, right

What's my name
Tell me, baby, what's my name
Tell me, sweetie, what's my name

Songwriters: Keith Richards / Mick Jagger
Sympathy for the Devil lyrics © Abkco Music, Inc

I hope that many of you did not feel the contribution by the Rolling Stones to be irreverent. It certainly is not. For those who have ears hear that there are many profound theological comments found within the song. Literally, a book could be written on the commentary sung by Mick Jagger. One has.



How many of you have read C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*? In this text, Lewis allows one to eavesdrop on the lessons taught by a senior tempter ('Screwtape') to a junior tempter ('Wormwood').



The instructions given on how to cause humans to fall reveal much about human nature and the nature of, what the science fiction series ‘Star Wars’ refers to as, ‘the Dark Side’. Much in our popular culture comments on exactly that which our scriptures do. Hence, sermons, if they are to be relevant to the twenty-first century, are only enhanced with audio and visual interpretations.



Mick Jagger speaks in the voice of ‘Lucifer’. While taking us through major historical events, he boasts that he has stolen many people’s “soul and faith”. He mentions Jesus’ time in the desert for forty days, about which we recently learned.

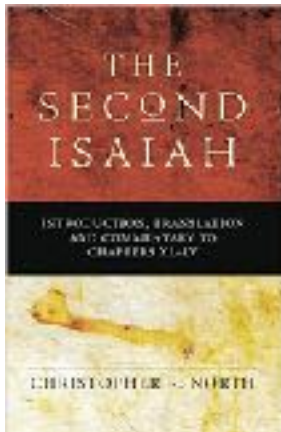


And Mick Jagger foreshadows that which we will soon, during Holy Week, witness: the trial and sentencing of Jesus by Pilate. We hear about the brutality of the Russian Revolution and the inhumanity of the Second World War. We are reminded of the Protestant and Catholic reformations and the Thirty Years' War.



We are brought into the twentieth century with the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy. The antagonist introduces himself, but he does not reveal the nature of his game - his intentions. This Lent we are also introduced to the One Who Tempts and we ask ourselves that which is puzzling us: 'What Is the Nature of His Game?'

I believe our two scripture readings this morning assist us.

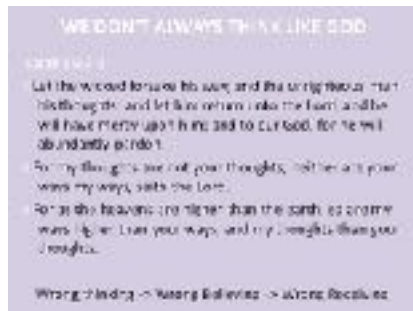


Our first reading is from what scholars refer to as ‘Second Isaiah’ (A.K.A. Deutero-Isaiah, chapters 40-55). It was written when the Israelites were exiled in Babylon. They were a whipped people, literally. They were broken and destroyed and so was their Temple, their capital, Jerusalem, and their nation, that they understood, from the Davidic Covenant, would last forever. They were a people who felt chastened by God, abandoned and forgotten.



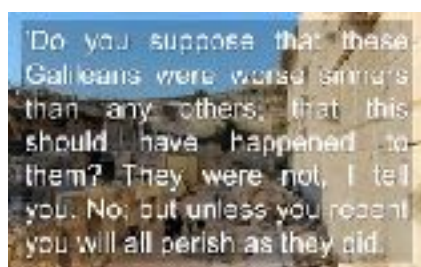
Yet, Second Isaiah comforts them and offers them restoration in God’s sight, reconciliation with the Divine and relationship with the Holy One. Second Isaiah gives the people hearing the word cause to remain faithful, because God will not only restore them, but God will reconcile them to everyone, to all nations, so that they will be in solidarity with them and in covenant with God. To those who may have

claimed that God abandoned them, Second Isaiah declares radical inclusion, gobsmacking acceptance, remarkable forgiveness and peace. To even the wicked, God 'will freely forgive them' (Isaiah 55:7). Why? Because God's ways are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9).



And God's thoughts are not our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8). God accepts and offers love and acceptance to those we often do not. Isaiah foreshadows the words of Paul when he said that 'nothing can separate us from the love of God' (Romans 8:38-39).

Our Christian scripture reading from Luke may seem on first reading to be one of only judgement.



Jesus refers to an incident where Pilate massacred a group of Galileans (Luke 13:2-3). Many thought these Galileans must have offended God, otherwise God would not allow them to be brutalized.



The second incident was a construction accident, when a tower fell on some pilgrim worshippers killing them (Luke 13:4-5). Jesus told those listening that they were no less sinners than the ones killed.

Therefore, Jesus was saying (if he had a southern accent), “Ya’ll stink. And ya’ll better repent”. And does not Mick Jagger sing the same when he said that “every cop is a criminal and all sinners are saints”? Jesus calls us all to repent, not to condemn us, but to show us unfathomable love.



**The Parable
Of The
Barren
Fig Tree**

Luke 13:6-9

Jesus refers to fig tree being cut down (Luke 13:6-10). Again, on first glance, this scripture seems to be one of judgement. But upon closer examination, I hear of a tree producing no fruit - in other words ‘a sinner’. When being cut down is more than warranted, the vine-

dresser decides to give the tree more time to produce good fruit - to repent, to change ways and to be restored to a favorable relationship with God.

So, what is the nature of the Tempter's game? Are you still puzzled, are you still confused about it?

I'm not sure if you caught it. But, at the end of the song, Mick Jagger sings quickly (you can barely catch it, it is so fast), "I tell you one time, you're to blame". What does that mean, "I'm to blame"?

Friends, interpret the scriptures and Mick Jagger's song as you might, but I hear clearly from the scriptures that nothing can separate us from the love of God if we acknowledge our sins. Isaiah and Luke both proclaim, "Let the wicked abandon their ways and evil men their thoughts, let them return to the Lord [...] for he will freely forgive" (Isaiah 55:7).

Who killed the Kennedys? Mick Jagger says, it was "you and me". And Mick Jagger sang that if I am lost, then I am to blame - not the One Who Tempts.



So, what is the nature of his game? It is to convince you and I that we are lost, broken and sinful and that there is no path to

restoration and thus no reason to repent. Satan's game is to convince you and I that God's love has limits when God's love has NO LIMITS.

The Tempter's game is to deceive us into thinking that God's thoughts and ways are the same as ours - limited.



But, God's thoughts and ways are not our ways - and God always invites us back into relationship with Godself.

This was the Word of God, and it was preached to the people of God, the people of God responded, "Amen!"