

13th Sunday after Pentecost

Occasion: Proper 18

Sunday, September 8, 2019

Year (cycle): C

Resource Website Links:

[The Collect/Readings¹](#)

[Book/Passage Summaries²](#)

[Reflection³](#)

The Collect:

Grant us, O Lord, to trust in you with all our hearts; for, as you always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so you never forsake those who make their boast of your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Reading 1

Old Testament:

Jeremiah 18:1-11

1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 2‘Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.’ 3So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. 4The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

5 Then the word of the Lord came to me: 6Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the Lord. Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. 7At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, 8but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. 9And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, 10but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. 11Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the Lord: Look, I am a potter

shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

[Link to Passage Summary](#)

Reflection:

Jeremiah 18:1-11

In this image of the potter and clay, I hear a message about repentance and re-making. God is offering God's people yet another chance to turn from their self-destructive ways and try again.

A friend of mine has recently begun working with clay, and from her experience I see that throwing a block of clay and shaping it over and over again requires patience, diligence, and a sizeable amount of hopefulness. Even when her pieces turn out a little irregular or not quite the way she hoped, she is still very fond of her creations and can't bring herself to throw them out.

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, God gives God's people many—countless, even— opportunities to repent and try again. While it might be tempting to read this passage as a prophecy about destruction, to me it seems more to be an illustration of God's fondness for created beings and unceasing willingness to allow them to try again.

- In what ways might God be asking you to stop, turn, and try again?

Reading 2

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17

- 1 Lord, you have searched me out and known me; *
you know my sitting down and my rising up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
- 2 You trace my journeys and my resting-places *
and are acquainted with all my ways.
- 3 Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, *
but you, O Lord, know it altogether.
- 4 You press upon me behind and before *
and lay your hand upon me.
- 5 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; *
it is so high that I cannot attain to it.
- 12 For you yourself created my inmost parts; *

you knit me together in my mother's womb.
13 I will thank you because I am marvelously made; *
your works are wonderful, and I know it well.
14 My body was not hidden from you, *
while I was being made in secret
and woven in the depths of the earth.
15 Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb;
all of them were written in your book; *
they were fashioned day by day,
when as yet there was none of them.
16 How deep I find your thoughts, O God! *
how great is the sum of them!
17 If I were to count them, they would be more in number
than the sand; *
to count them all, my life span would need to
be like yours.

[Link to Passage Summary](#)

Reflection:

Psalm 139:1-5; 12-17

I am infinitely grateful for this timeless psalm. Beginning with Adam and Eve's shame at their nakedness in front of God in the garden to our own multitude of insecurities and even loathing of our own bodies, this psalm responds to ages of human discomfort with our bodies with how intimately and deeply God knows us and loves us.

It is an understatement to say that the Christian tradition hasn't always handled the realities of our embodiment very well, but this psalm gives us an idea of how God might prefer that we view our bodies: "I will thank you because I am marvelously made; your works are wonderful, and I know it well."

We know in the abstract that God considers creation good, but we find that harder to believe when it comes to our very own real-life bodies and the bodies of those different from us. Perhaps this psalm is one to write on the bathroom mirror and keep on a note card in the car, the church pew, or the office.

- What would change if we could see ourselves and everyone we meet as inherently "marvelously made"?

Reading 3

Epistle:

Philemon 1-21

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, 2to Apphia our sister, to
Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in your house:

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God 5because I
hear of your love for all the saints and your faith towards the Lord Jesus. 6I
pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive
all the good that we may do for Christ. 7I have indeed received much joy
and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have
been refreshed through you, my brother.

8 For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do
your duty, 9yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I,
Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. 10I
am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become
during my imprisonment. 11Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is
indeed useful both to you and to me. 12I am sending him, that is, my own
heart, back to you. 13I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of
service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; 14but I
preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed
might be voluntary and not something forced. 15Perhaps this is the reason
he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back for
ever, 16no longer as a slave but as more than a slave, a beloved brother—
especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the
Lord.

17 So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome
me. 18If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that
to my account. 19I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I
say nothing about your owing me even your own self. 20Yes, brother, let
me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ.

21Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do
even more than I say.

[Link to Passage Summary](#)

Reflection:

Philemon 1-21

This brief epistle of Paul's is scant in verses but rich in interpretative possibilities. All we know about the context and impetus for this letter is what the letter itself contains, and we can't be sure of the situation to which Paul is responding. Did Philemon send Onesimus to take care of Paul while he's in prison? Did Onesimus run away and seek out Paul to intercede on his behalf after he committed some kind of social wrong?

What is clear is that Paul is prepared to use his considerable powers of persuasion to convince Philemon to welcome Onesimus back as warmly as Paul himself would be welcomed. Paul doesn't command Philemon to do anything, but he makes it clear what he thinks Philemon ought to do.

Moreover, Paul knows this letter will be read aloud to the whole household, and he lets that serve as an added nudge to Philemon to do the right thing. What is apparent, aside from Paul's keen powers of persuasion, is his affection for Onesimus, whom it seems he brought to Christ during their time together. Paul says of him: "I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you." It is clear that whatever the circumstances, Philemon likely doesn't see Onesimus the way Paul sees him, and yet Paul must send his "own heart" back out into the world, hoping he will be received as a beloved sibling in Christ. Paul's challenge to Philemon could be seen as a challenge to each of us, persuading us to see those about whom we have preconceived notions in a new and more loving way.

- Whom might you be challenged to see in a new light, prompted by the understanding that they are someone's "own heart" walking around in the world?

Reading 4

Gospel:

Luke 14:25-33

25 Now large crowds were travelling with him; and he turned and said to them, 26 'Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all

who see it will begin to ridicule him, 30saying, “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.” 31Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. 33So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

[Link to Passage Summary](#)

Reflection:

Luke 14:25-33

Crowds have gathered around Jesus, pushing past each other to hear what he has to say. Casting an eye over the crowd, Jesus sees that they surely don't realize what a commitment following his path will be. After all, following Jesus requires letting go of things that previously seemed important or alluring and reorienting to a new way of living.

This requirement brings us back to Jeremiah's words, “Turn now... amend your ways and your doings.” Jesus is reminding those listening that it isn't possible to maintain the values of the dominant culture when making a commitment to God's vision for the world. All the possessions and social standing that seemingly help one get ahead aren't much help when following Jesus' sacrificial way of living. One cannot merely give lip service to walking in the way of Jesus—it requires an examination of priorities, attachments, and patterns of living. The good news is that doing so lightens our load for the journey so that we are freed to pay attention to where God is moving and how we might join with others in God's work in the world.

- Do you build in time to pause and re-examine your attachments and priorities? The transition from summer to fall can be a fruitful time to re-evaluate habits and commitments and how we might live in a more Christ-shaped way.

Sources

¹ “Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost, ” *The Episcopal Church*, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/lectionary/thirteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-1>

² Chris Haslam, “Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost-September 8, 2019,” *Comments: Revised Lectionary Commentary*, <http://montreal.anglican.org/comments/cpr23m.shtml?>

³Lucy Strandlund, “Pentecost 13 (C)-September 8, 2019, *Bible Study*, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/bible-study/bible-study-pentecost-13-c-september-8-2019>