

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Occasion: Proper 20

Sunday, September 22, 2019

Year (cycle): C

Resource Website Links:

[The Collect/Readings¹](#)

[Book/Passage Summaries²](#)

[Reflection Question\(s\)³](#)

The Collect:

Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Reading 1

Old Testament:

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1

18 My joy is gone, grief is upon me,
my heart is sick.

19 Hark, the cry of my poor people
from far and wide in the land:

‘Is the Lord not in Zion?
Is her King not in her?’

(‘Why have they provoked me to anger with their images,
with their foreign idols?’)

20 ‘The harvest is past, the summer is ended,
and we are not saved.’

21 For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt,
I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me.

22 Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?

Why then has the health of my poor people
not been restored?

1 O that my head were a spring of water,

and my eyes a fountain of tears,
so that I might weep day and night
for the slain of my poor people!

[Link to Passage Summary](#)

Reflection Question(s):

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1

There are times when we feel the weight of life on our shoulders. Jeremiah laments, “My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick” (8:18, NRSV). In this passage, Jeremiah is mourning not only the upcoming destruction of Jerusalem but also the exile of his people. The world is crumbling around him; the people of Israel have turned away from God and judgment is coming. “I am hurt, I mourn” (8:21), the prophet writes, not just as a statement of sorrow but of resignation for the people of his nation. However, as desperate and resigned as this passage is, God is not some apathetic observer; God is actively engaged. And while Jerusalem’s destruction and Israel’s exile will be a time of struggle, pain, and despair, there is hope. God is there, holding God’s people in God’s hand while they await and finally endure the coming suffering. People of faith tend to be sympathetic towards the hurt in this world. We strive for justice, peace, and love, but when those virtues seem absent, we too lament. But, as we not only speak out against injustice, strife, and fear but also work towards addressing those issues, we have to understand that sin does not get the final word. God does. Because of that, we should always live, regardless of the circumstances, lives of hope.

- In times of lament, how do you hold on to hope in God?
- What is the role of the prophetic voice in our culture today?

Reading 2

Psalm 79:1-9

1 O God, the heathen have come into your inheritance;
they have profaned your holy temple; *
they have made Jerusalem a heap of rubble.
2 They have given the bodies of your servants as food for the
birds of the air, *
and the flesh of your faithful ones to the beasts

of the field.
3 They have shed their blood like water on every side
of Jerusalem, *
and there was no one to bury them.
4 We have become a reproach to our neighbors, *
an object of scorn and derision to those around us.
5 How long will you be angry, O Lord? *
will your fury blaze like fire for ever?
6 Pour out your wrath upon the heathen who have not
known you *
and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon
your Name.
7 For they have devoured Jacob *
and made his dwelling a ruin.
8 Remember not our past sins;
let your compassion be swift to meet us; *
for we have been brought very low.
9 Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your Name; *
deliver us and forgive us our sins, for your Name's sake.

[Link to Passage Summary](#)

Reflection Question(s):

Psalm 79:1-9

This psalm, like many of the psalms, is very vivid. There is little to be left to the imagination regarding the writer's mental, emotional, and spiritual states. The writer is upset at the fact that the Temple, the place where heaven and earth mingle, has been "profaned" (v. 1, BCP), Jerusalem has been destroyed, and a significant portion of the population has been massacred. It is no wonder why the author asks God to "pour out your wrath upon the heathen who have not known you" (v. 6). Admittedly, it can be uncomfortable for us to face the fact that a cry for vengeance is in our scriptures, scriptures that call for us to be compassionate, forgiving, and completely self-giving. However, what the psalms show us is how to give voice to our pain—how we too can offer up those raw feelings to God. The worst thing we can do is allow those raw emotions to fester, mutate, and finally corrupt our being. We offer those feelings up to God so that God can

hold them and help us deal with them before they become destructive words or actions.

- How do you express your raw emotions to God?
- Do you tend to clean up your thoughts and emotions before offering them to God?

Reading 3

Epistle:

1 Timothy 2:1-7

1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be made for everyone, 2for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. 3This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, 4who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5For there is one God;

there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human,

6 who gave himself a ransom for all

—this was attested at the right time. 7For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

[Link to Passage Summary](#)

Reflection Question(s):

1 Timothy 2:1-7

Prayer is an essential aspect of the Christian life. In this selection from 1 Timothy, the author of this letter urges those in Ephesus to hold regular prayer meetings. Prayers offered at these meetings, however, are not just offered for those present, but also for those in authority. Prayer is not something reserved for a select few, but something to be offered to all people regardless of who they are. We pray to nurture an environment of peace. As we nurture peace within ourselves and desire peace and goodwill for all humanity, we live into our calling as Christians, as followers of the enfleshed God of peace, Jesus.

- What does prayer feel like when you pray for those you may not like or agree with?
- When you pray, does it feel like you're nourishing peace?

Reading 4

Gospel:

Luke 16:1-13

1 Then Jesus said to the disciples, 'There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. 2 So he summoned him and said to him, "What is this that I hear about you? Give me an account of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer." 3 Then the manager said to himself, "What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. 4 I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes." 5 So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, "How much do you owe my master?" 6 He answered, "A hundred jugs of olive oil." He said to him, "Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty." 7 Then he asked another, "And how much do you owe?" He replied, "A hundred containers of wheat." He said to him, "Take your bill and make it eighty." 8 And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. 9 And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes. 10 'Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. 11 If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? 12 And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? 13 No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.'*

[Link to Passage Summary](#)

Reflection Question(s):

Luke 16:1-13

This parable is a confusing one. It appears as if it's an ends-justify-the-means parable. It would be incorrect to say that the manager was not self-serving in this parable. He knows that he is not suited for any other work (v. 3). Verse 4 gives us a hint of what this parable is getting at: the manager wants to be charitable because he understands that the debtors will show him charity when he loses his job. However, his master unexpectedly shows charity to the manager for his shrewd manner of collecting the debts.

The manager gained nothing financially from settling the debts but regained the trust of his master. By slashing the debts, the manager was, essentially, slashing his commission from the price. But what he regained was his master's confidence. The manager showed charity to the debtors and the master showed charity to the manager.

This expectation-based form of charity is only the first step towards the charity of the Kingdom of God. Charity in the Kingdom of God is a one-way street—charity that expects nothing in return. What we're seeing here is the first imperfect stage in anticipation for the kingdom of "eternal homes" (v. 9) that are part of the Kingdom of God. And while this manner of shrewdly acquiring and distributing wealth gets the job done, the true expectation is complete charity for everybody regardless of the circumstance. This is what serving God and God alone looks like.

- What does a perfectly charitable society look like?
- How do you bring charity to your life?

Sources

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

² Chris Haslam, “Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost-September 22, 2019,” *Comments: Revised Lectionary Commentary*, <http://montreal.anglican.org/comments/cpr25m.shtml?>

³Daniel Johnson, “Pentecost 15 (C)-September 22, 2019”, *Bible Study*, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/bible-study/bible-study-pentecost-15-c-september-22-2019>