

*The Lessons Appointed for Use on the*

**Sunday closest to October 19**

**Proper 24**

**Year C**

**RCL**



Jeremiah 31:27-34

Psalm 119:97-104

Luke 18:1-8

The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ you have revealed your glory among the nations: Preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **Jeremiah 31:27-34**

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. And just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the LORD. In those days they shall no longer say:

*The parents have eaten sour grapes,  
and the children's teeth are set on edge.*

But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge.

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand

to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

**Psalm 119:97-104, Page 771, BCP**

*Quomodo dilexi!*

<sup>97</sup> Oh, how I love your law! All the day long it is in my mind.

<sup>98</sup> Your commandment has made me wiser than my enemies, and it is always with me.

<sup>99</sup> I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your decrees are my study.

<sup>100</sup> I am wiser than the elders, because I observe your commandments.

<sup>101</sup> I restrain my feet from every evil way, that I may keep your word.

<sup>102</sup> I do not shrink from your judgments, because you yourself have taught me.

<sup>103</sup> How sweet are your words to my taste! They are sweeter than honey to my mouth.

<sup>104</sup> Through your commandments I gain understanding; therefore I hate every lying way.

## **Luke 18:1-8**

Jesus told his disciples a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’” And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet,

when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

## SERMON

Last week I spoke of my perception that our concept of justice is spoiled by an unhealthy appetite for vengeance. I got a lesson this week on how poorly I take my own advice when I read of the aftermath of a burglary in Portsmouth reported on WSAZ and I'm truly ashamed of myself. I need to confess. Here's what I read.

*PORTSMOUTH, Ohio (WSAZ) -- A man shot in what's being described as a home invasion is being taken off life support as of Monday evening.*

*Police say Keith Richards, 31, of Portsmouth, broke into the house in the 1000 block of 23rd Street in Portsmouth Sunday night. The house had also been broken into the previous night, and police say they were investigating Richards in that burglary and several others in Portsmouth, after finding several items and stolen property in his house Monday.*

Before I make my confession to you, what is your reaction to that bit of news – that the burglar is being taken off life support? I need to confess to you in shame that my first emotion was one of satisfaction, a feeling of justice completed. Somebody, a child of God, has died and I feel a sense of satisfaction? That's bad enough of me but it wasn't until I read further about the response from the home owner's family that I was really confronted by how inappropriate my response was. It turns out that the house had been owned by a lady who had died in early September after her third battle with breast cancer. The house had been broken into the previous night, so one of the lady's relatives was coming in the front door to guard the house when he encountered Richards climbing in a back window. He warned him away, and when Richards continued, he shot him. Those are the bare facts. It is the response of



the deceased owner's sister, Karen Brown, that so shamed me.

*Brown was torn Monday, tearing up as she talked about her concern for the relative who shot Richards – and her hope that Richards would survive.*

*“To shoot a person, no matter what they were doing, they were wrong, but you don't know what it does to a person when you have to shoot somebody,” Brown said. “He doesn't deserve to die for what he did. If he dies from his injuries, he's dying for something petty.”*

Her words are closer to my understanding of Jesus' teaching than the awful sense of satisfaction that I had felt. “He doesn't deserve to die for what he did.” She is exactly right, and I, sinner that I am, jumped to a tawdry and shameful reaction. WSAZ continued:

*Police said Monday evening that Richards' family had signed the paperwork to take him off of life support.*

My shame got worse. The burglar had a family. He was some woman's son. Perhaps he had children of his own, this man whose death I celebrated as satisfying the demands of justice. He was wrong, as she rightly noted, but he didn't deserve to die for what he did, just as she said. I know that. It was a cheese and baloney burglary of a supposedly empty house. That's what cops call the stupid little burglaries that happen all the time, "cheese and baloney burglaries" because most often, what is stolen is some cheese and baloney from the refrigerator. It's a pitiable crime. I know he didn't deserve to die for something so banal, but nonetheless my first reaction was to celebrate his death as the satisfaction of justice. The wrongdoer has been dropped in the street just as we see over and over on TV and in the movies. This lesson is the way of the world, and despite my best efforts, I had learned it. I am ashamed. I am guilty. I confess.

When we use the phrase “the ways of the world” most often what we mean is a whole lot of cussin’ and stealin’ and covetin’. That’s not the ways of the world. The ways of the world are the whispered affirmation that might makes right, and that someone else’s sin grants us permission to retaliate in like form. The ways of the world teach us to measure our morality against the collective morality, rather than against the Law of God.

President Carter once said:

*War may sometimes be a necessary evil. But no matter how necessary, it is always an evil, never a good. We will not learn how to live together in peace by killing each other's children.*

Living within a culture that believes in the power of high explosives, Glocks and boots on the ground to rid the world of evil makes it practically impossible to embrace President Carter’s words. Killing people may

sometimes be a necessary evil, but no matter how necessary, it is always an evil, never a good. The ways of the world do not teach us that lesson. We want death without consequence. We want to quit while we're ahead and pretend that the game doesn't go on after we leave the table. It is in our addiction to a "might makes right" ethic that we see most clearly how our ideas of justice and God's diverge. God's justice restores. The ways of the world are to combat evil by evil's own methods. God's justice seeks to remove the stain of sin and restore the person. The ways of the world teach that the way to oppose evil is to kill the bad guys. I think Satan must roll on the floor over this one.

Turning from the ways of the world to the ways of God is perhaps the most challenging thing humanity undertakes. We endlessly dodge that challenge until we can't. When I tell you that the people of Jerusalem were

sent into exile in Babylon for failing to follow through on the reforms of Josiah and, instead, falling back into the idolatry of Manasseh, it's pretty easy to tell yourself, "Whew! Am I glad I never paid any attention to Manasseh! I'm home free. Don't you go confusing me with those guys chasing after Manasseh, whoever he was!" When I tell you that the "ways of the world", the assumptions and permissions which our culture teaches every last one of us are a snare and a trap, we tend to go looking for a more agreeable preacher. When we celebrate, however briefly, the destruction of one of God's children we have faced a choice between the ways of God and the ways of the world, and chosen wrongly. We will not learn how to live together in peace by killing each other's children. We will not learn how to live with God by killing His children, either. Do you not know that if God wished them dead they would wither

and die? The ways of the world teach us the way of death. God teaches the way of life.

I really don't have the skill to cast you back 2,600 years to the time of Jeremiah so that you could feel the sense of catastrophe and abandonment those poor people must have felt seeing their city swamped by Babylonian soldiers, seeing their protective walls flattened and the very Temple of God set alight. There's just nothing in our experience with which to liken it. The people who survived the fall of Jerusalem and the slaughter that followed still had a 700 mile hike ahead of them, and those that survived that now find themselves squatting beside an irrigation ditch in a far-away country where the language and customs are all a closed book to them.

By the rivers of Babylon—  
there we sat down and there we wept

when we remembered Zion.  
On the willows there  
we hung up our harps.  
For there our captors  
asked us for songs,  
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,  
‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’

NOW the exiles could see how the ways of the world in which they found themselves diverged from the ways of the Lord. NOW they could contemplate what they had done, separated from the cues which had whispered to them that God approved of their ways. And now they could come face to face with what they had lost by attending to the seductive words of their culture instead of the words of the Lord. It rips my heart out to think how they must have felt. Look at the pictures of refugees from around the world, the faces of Jews and Gypsies in faded photos milling around cattle cars, lost,

looking for a familiar face or a word of kindness. Look at more recent photos from Rwanda and read the same story of fear and abandonment upon their faces. Recall the blasted faces of the parents in Syria weeping for their children who were no more! This and more was the experience of those who squatted hopelessly beside the rivers of Babylon. Then, hear the words of the Lord written to them by Jeremiah.

*The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. And just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the LORD...The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ... this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I*



*will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ... I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.*

There is HOPE. It is not ended! God will bring them back into His arms and forgive them!

Yes, I have sinned greatly, before you and before the Lord when I celebrated, even for an instant, the death of one of God's children. Those who love me will say, "Oh, don't be so hard on yourself. Everybody does that. It's just natural," as if that was an excuse. Those are the ways of the world, the teaching that leads to death. With the assurance of hope which Jeremiah gave to the exiles, I will confess, and God will say to me, "I will forgive your iniquity and remember your sin no more."

AMEN

*Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.*

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