

**The Lessons Ap-
pointed for Use on the
Sunday Closest to June 22:**



Proper 7

Year A

RCL

Jeremiah 20:7-13

Psalms 69: 8-11, (12-17), 18-20

Matthew 10:24-39

The Collect

O Lord, make us have perpetual love and reverence for your holy Name, for you never fail to help and govern those whom you have set upon the sure foundation of your loving-kindness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Jeremiah 20:7-13

O Lord, you have enticed me,
and I was enticed;
you have overpowered me,
and you have prevailed.
I have become a laughingstock all day long;
everyone mocks me.
For whenever I speak, I must cry out,
I must shout, “Violence and destruction!”
For the word of the LORD has become for me
a reproach and derision all day long.
If I say, “I will not mention him,
or speak any more in his name,”
then within me there is something like a burn-
ing fire
shut up in my bones;
I am weary with holding it in,
and I cannot.
For I hear many whispering:
“Terror is all around!

Denounce him! Let us denounce him!”

All my close friends
are watching for me to stumble.

“Perhaps he can be enticed,
and we can prevail against him,
and take our revenge on him.”

But the LORD is with me like a dread warrior;
therefore my persecutors will stumble,
and they will not prevail.

They will be greatly shamed,
for they will not succeed.

Their eternal dishonor
will never be forgotten.

O LORD of hosts, you test the righteous,
you see the heart and the mind;
let me see your retribution upon them,
for to you I have committed my cause.

Sing to the LORD;
praise the LORD!

For he has delivered the life of the needy
from the hands of evildoers.

Psalm 69: 8-11, (12-17), 18-20

Salvum me fac

8 Surely, for your sake have I suffered reproach, *
and shame has covered my face.

9 I have become a stranger to my own kindred, *
an alien to my mother's children.

10 Zeal for your house has eaten me up; *
the scorn of those who scorn you has fallen upon me.

11 I humbled myself with fasting, *
but that was turned to my reproach.

[12 I put on sack-cloth also, *
and became a byword among them.

13 Those who sit at the gate murmur against me, *

and the drunkards make songs about me.

14 But as for me, this is my prayer to you, *
at the time you have set, O LORD:

15 "In your great mercy, O God, *
answer me with your unfailing help.

16 Save me from the mire; do not let me sink;
*

let me be rescued from those who hate me
and out of the deep waters.

17 Let not the torrent of waters wash over me,
neither let the deep swallow me up; *
do not let the Pit shut its mouth upon me.]

18 Answer me, O LORD, for your love is kind; *
in your great compassion, turn to me.'

19 "Hide not your face from your servant; *
be swift and answer me, for I am in distress.

20 Draw near to me and redeem me; *
because of my enemies deliver me.

Matthew 10:24-39

Jesus said to the twelve disciples, “A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the house-

tops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace

to the earth; I have not come to bring peace,
but a sword.

For I have come to set a man against his
father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-
in-law;
and one's foes will be members of one's
own household.

Whoever loves father or mother more than
me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son
or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;
and whoever does not take up the cross and
follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find
their life will lose it, and those who lose their
life for my sake will find it.”

SERMON

Pete Seeger told a story of four blind men examining an elephant. One felt the side of the elephant and reported that an elephant was like a great wall, reaching up higher than he could stand. Another felt the leg of the elephant and said that an elephant was like a great tree. Another felt the trunk of the elephant and described an elephant as a great snake, and the last felt the elephant's tail. He reported that an elephant was like a rope hanging from the sky. If you pull on it, the heavens open up with filth.

Coming to know God is like the experience

of the blind men. Each man's observations were valid, within their own experience, but each observation failed to accurately capture the essence of an elephant, and, more importantly, even if we consider all their observations together, we still don't know the totality of what an elephant is. Recognizing this truth is the first step to a proper relationship with God and why those people who fool themselves into believing that they have captured the essence of God within their own little boxes are so very much to be pitied. Even if we admit that we are unable, due to our own human frailty, to know the totality of God, we

can, nonetheless, just as the blind men did, come to know portions of God's existence as He reveals Himself to us in our own lives.

Last Sunday, we talked a bit about the Imperial nature of God as revealed by Abraham's actions in serving God, and Jesus' actions as general, sending forth his troops. This Sunday, our texts present opportunities to examine the ways in which God intervenes in our lives to complete His purposes. As Jeremiah tells us, the intervention of God into our lives is overpowering and, inevitably, uncomfortable.

O LORD, you have enticed me,
and I was enticed;
you have overpowered me,
and you have prevailed.
I have become a laughingstock all
day long;
everyone mocks me.

This sort of intervention by God in our lives, our plans, our priorities, scares many of us. I had a friend years ago, who was very wary of her church because she feared that if she became too involved with God, He would send her as a missionary to “darkest Africa”, wherever that might be. Now, I knew her mother, so I know where that came from, but it was a great stumbling block to her in her faith jour-

ney. It was also a tacit admission of her understanding of God's ability to intervene and demand obedience, as Jeremiah found.

If we are willing to admit that God has power to intervene in life, we have also to admit that God has power to intervene in our personal lives, and that's scary, church. What if He wants to send you to darkest Africa? What if you don't even know what part of Africa might be the darkest, but you're sure you don't want to go there? Maybe it's best to leave a little wiggle room between me and God?

Jeremiah is sometimes called the "broken-hearted prophet" because nobody would listen

to him. Worse than that, God told him ahead of time that nobody would listen to him. His message was that God's people had so far strayed from their covenant with God, that God intended to punish them through the agency of the Babylonian army. Jerusalem's only hope was to surrender to Babylon, accept the just punishment of God and to repent. As you can imagine, this was not a best-selling book. Nobody's happy to hear that God is not pleased with them. Besides, God's Temple, His very house, was in Jerusalem. God would never allow Jerusalem, and His Temple, to fall to Babylon, would He? Everybody but Jeremiah

was quite sure that God would protect them no matter how badly they had failed Him.

It's odd to think about, but Jeremiah's message to Jerusalem in the Sixth Century b.c.e. has strange echos in our own time. History shows that America has, in fact, sinned against blacks, against Native Americans, against the poor. It is not much of a stretch to imagine that God would be justified in punishing us for that. Jeremiah's broken-hearted prophesy was just as popular in his time as such a speculation would be in our time, by which I mean not much. Then and now, nobody's happy to hear that God is not pleased with them.

Babylon did besiege Jerusalem in 588 b.c.e., just as Jeremiah had prophesied, but then, in a stunning reversal, they withdrew when they believed Egypt was sending troops to assist Jerusalem. Here's poor old Jeremiah preaching the destruction of Jerusalem to people who don't want to hear that and then the people he's talking to see the enemy withdraw in response to their prayers. The people thought they understood the fullness of God, just as did our four blind men. Jeremiah had to feel a perfect idiot, but try as he might, he could not stop delivering the message.

For whenever I speak, I must cry

out,

I must shout, "Violence and destruction!"

For the word of the LORD has become for me

a reproach and derision all day long.

If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,"

then within me there is something like a burning fire

shut up in my bones;

I am weary with holding it in,

and I cannot.

Then, two years later, Babylon returned, took Jerusalem, and carried its people off to exile, just as Jeremiah had prophesied.

Jeremiah's experience is a good example of

how God can, for His own reasons, reach out and grab us to accomplish His purposes. But, Jeremiah was a pretty cranky old bear anyway. It's easy to put some distance between us and Jeremiah.

Then Jesus tells us:

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. . .”

Jesus is being pretty clear here that he has first call on all we do, on all we are. If we take on the name Christian, our first loyalty is to Christ, and that loyalty and obligation is even

greater than the love a child owes a father or a mother. No wonder my friend who feared being sent to “darkest Africa” was wary of involving herself too closely with the work of her church!

So, how does this relate to the elephant and the four blind men? You do remember the elephant, don't you?

Each of us finds a piece of God which we can touch. For most of us, it's the loving, sustaining God, the one that died for our sins who makes one set of footprints in the sand when he carries us, the Jesus who will meet us in our time of need, the throne of grace from which

we obtain mercy. Because we are blind, our belief is that God is like a wall, or a great tree, or a snake. It is only when we realize that there are other dimensions of God, and acknowledge that we don't have the fullness of God in our pockets that we can come to understand the degree to which we live by God's grace in God's creation and the enormous debt of loyalty we owe to Him.

God may not call on us to prophesy a message as unpopular as Jeremiah's. He does, however, call upon us to respond to His sovereignty in faith and loyalty. Go ye and do likewise, church.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

Professor Lisa Davison translates Micah 6:8 as follows:

What does the Holy One require of us? To make justice happen; to love passionately as the Holy loves; and to be the Divine's image in the world!

Then, she comments, “Notice that there is no ‘try’ in there. The Holy One expects, no demands, that we do these things.”

I have found it wise to heed Professor Davison’s words.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and
be gracious to you;

the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

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

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