

**Sermon Notes from CMJ**  
10th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

**RCL Readings** – 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13; Psalm 51:1-13; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35

**ACNA Readings** – Exodus 16:2-4, 9–15; Psalm 78:1-26; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35

**Introduction.** Sin is something more than simply breaking a commandment of God. Sin is even more than simply ‘missing the mark’, as we often like to refer to it from the lexicon. Sin does indeed displease the Lord, as we will read today, but also some sins reveal that deep in our hearts we dare so much as to despise the Lord. And when you look up the definition of ‘despise’, that is a terrible thought to entertain in relation to God.

**Common Theme.** Repentance is one of the powerful themes of the readings this week. God knows us better than we know ourselves, and he knows what we truly need. He knows we need the bread of heaven, and he knows we need the opportunity to repent and unburden ourselves of the sins that weigh us down.

**2 Samuel 11:26-12:13.** Following David’s coverup of the adultery and the murder of Uriah, David takes Bathsheba as his newest wife. The passage never actually calls Bathsheba by name, instead referring to her title as the ‘wife of Uriah’. In doing so the text highlights that she was supposed to have been the wife of Uriah and not David’s wife at all. We hear nothing from her in this story as she doesn’t say anything, however, God is now mentioned for the first time in this chapter, and he is displeased. God is displeased by more than just the ‘sin’. Nathan the prophet becomes involved and reveals the sin to David through a parable. David responds to the parable by saying that retribution must be meted out fourfold as detailed in the Torah in Exodus 22:1. This judgment will literally befall David as he will lose four sons for the life of Uriah: the unnamed firstborn child of Bathsheba, Absalom, Amnon, and Adonijah. Not only has David done ‘evil in God’s sight’, but he has ‘despised’ the word of the Lord. God had made an unconditional covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7 (last week’s reading) to build the House of David and bring salvation to the world. David had not simply sinned and ‘missed the mark’. David had despised what God had said and scorned the promises God had made. In so doing, David had despised God himself. To despise the Lord means to regard God with contempt. David internalizes what he has done and, through his honest words, we have the acknowledgement of the human condition: ‘I (we) have sinned against the Lord’.

**Psalm 51:1-13.** This psalm of David is regarded as a model of confession and is used as such both in Jewish and Christian liturgies. The psalm is titled in the Hebrew text as ‘A psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him after he had gone into Bathsheba’. It is the tradition that David penned this prayer as part of his confession before the Lord. The psalm is deeply emotional with the first several verses describing the dark nature of sin and the dark side of ourselves. The psalm also celebrates God’s forgiveness, his loving-kindness and mercy, with verses 10-13 projecting the hope and light of forgiveness and salvation. Our reactions to the realization that we have sinned make a great difference to us, physiologically, socially, and spiritually. David does not attempt to justify his actions nor direct

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blame on anyone else. He simply appeals for the mercy of the Lord. This simple, honest and heartfelt request shows us there is much grace in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), more than some might think. David seeks God's forgiveness through his loving-kindness and not through the blood of bulls and goats. There is nothing David can do to 'make God be merciful'. More than verbal forgiveness, David also requests his transgressions be blotted out from the record books of heaven. David needs his conscience cleared as well so that he is not weighed down and crushed by the guilt of his sin so as to become ineffectual even after receiving forgiveness. One of the tactics of the Enemy is to constantly remind us of past sins, prompting us to feel inadequate for service or unworthy of any role in God's Kingdom. It is one of the treasures of the Church that, following the confession in the liturgy, the people receive the assurance of forgiveness. Sometimes we go to church and we 'know' that Jesus forgives, but we do not internalize that truth and do not have the assurance that we truly are forgiven. It is the pleasure of the church to announce that we truly do have forgiveness from the Lord.

**Ephesians 4:1-16.** Paul writes to the Ephesians instructing them on how to behave in response to what God has done for them. He opens the chapter quite strongly, begging the Ephesians to lead a life worthy of their calling. Behaving appropriately is a very Hebraic way of looking at obedience. Obedience is not works-righteousness, and while those two terms might look similar in practice, they actually hail from different attitudes of the heart. Dallas Willard puts it like this, 'Grace is not opposed to effort; it's opposed to earning'. Paul urges the Ephesians to 'make every effort' to maintain the unity of the Spirit. We have been brought together into a relationship with God, united by the Holy Spirit. However, we have a part to play in maintaining that unity. Paul declares that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Spirit. The instruments that were given to the Church to unite it seem to actually divide it. We constantly argue and create new denominations over differences regarding baptism, the Spirit, and communion. However, though we are divided, we should strive for unity. Paul quotes the Psalms to declare that the Messiah, following his ascension, gave gifts through the Spirit. But we did not all get the same gifts. We are not all equal in that way. We have the same Spirit but different gifts, and the only way we can have access to the gifts that we each have is to be in fellowship with each other.

**John 6:24-35.** The Gospel portion begins the day following the feeding of the 5,000. Looking for Jesus in Capernaum, those who partook of the miracle ask him a question, which Jesus does not answer. They ask where Jesus came from. His reply is not where he came from but why they came to him! Essentially the people wanted more of the miracles. They had partaken of an amazing miracle with obvious messianic implications, yet all they sought were more of the signs and miracles. Miracles in themselves do not save people. They had witnessed a miracle, perhaps even listened to Jesus' teaching, however, they had not absorbed the teaching. We should let that sink into our hearts as we gather to worship the Lord and hear God's word. Jesus tells them not to labour for food that does not endure. He is not instructing people to give up work or stop all agriculture. Rather he is critiquing our material culture. We pursue education, careers, property and more, all of which are good, valuable and very helpful for people. We should not stop any of those pursuits. However, we must all acknowledge with honesty that

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none of that endures, and their satisfaction is but fleeting. Material culture must always be kept in perspective.

Jesus instructs the people to work for spiritual food. Faith in Hebrew is *emunah*, and it is not a noun. Faith in Hebrew is a gerund, which in English is a word ending in ‘-ing’. Faith in the Bible should probably be rendered as faithfulness! *Emunah* implies activity, so when Jewish people talk about faith they often talk about doing something. This is not to be confused with works-righteousness. In Acts 2:37 after Peter had delivered his sermon, the hearers were convinced, and they asked, ‘What shall we do?’ not ‘In whom shall we believe?’ Here the people ask Jesus, ‘What must we do to perform the work of God?’ Jesus says the work of God is to believe. Belief, in the Hebrew perspective, is not something in the head. Even demons believe, and it does them no good. Therefore belief or faith needs accompanying activity. As Paul says in the Ephesians passage, ‘make every effort’. Instead of choosing to make an effort, the people ask for Jesus to perform more signs. They bring into the discussion the ancient miracle of manna during the Israelite Exodus. If Jesus is the new Moses then perhaps he will provide miraculous manna daily as Moses did? Jesus reminds the people it was God, not Moses, who provided the bread from heaven. Following the metaphor, Jesus continues that the Bread from Heaven will give life to the world. Jesus identifies himself as the Bread of Life. Jesus is the only thing that is certain, the only one who does not change. Jesus knows they need spiritual fulfilment and that they will never be satisfied with the material world. The gift that Jesus gives will endure, but like the manna in the desert, you still have to go out and collect it.

### **ACNA Addendum**

**Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15.** Miracles don’t save people. The Israelites had witnessed incredible plagues in Egypt, passed through the sea, followed a moving cloud in the desert. Their clothes never wore out, and yet they still complained. Now they would witness daily miracles as bread appeared every morning and quail settled every night. The bread is called ‘*man*’ in Exodus 16:15. Later in Exodus 29:26, the bread is called ‘*manna*’. Manna does not mean ‘what is it’; that is the question the Israelites ask of the bread. Manna in Hebrew means ‘portion’. Everyone went out to collect his or her portion. A lesson for us is that not everyone gets the same portion; actually, everyone’s portion is different. A person who has six in his family will need a portion for six; a person who has four will need a portion for four. Everyone gets what they need. This is reflected in the prayer Jesus taught. Give us this day our bread for today. How much you need will be different from how much I need. And I should not be jealous if your portion is greater than mine. Rather we should pray that everyone gets what they truly need with leftovers so we can all be generous and share.

**Psalms 78:1-26.** Psalm 78 is one of the 12 psalms attributed to Asaph. It is the second-longest psalm in the Bible, with the longest being Psalm 119 by David. The common command in the Bible is to remember. God commands his people to remember more times than any command. Why does he do

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that? Probably because we are a very forgetful people. This psalm urges the people not to forget the miracles of the Lord. We are urged to retell, remember and relearn what the Lord has done and what he has instructed us to do. Most of the miracles are related to the Exodus, which is the significant redemptive event in the sacred history of the Jewish people. The miracle of the manna is described as ‘mortals eating the bread of angels’. This is poetry and a prayer. We will probably only give ourselves a headache if we try to answer the questions that arise like, do angels really need to eat in heaven, and if so, how and why? Instead let’s draw upon the injunction in verse 7, ‘Do not forget’. Let’s not forget what God has done for us and the redemption given to the world through Jesus. Let us not forget to believe in him and to repent.

**About the author.** The Rev. Aaron Eime is the deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master’s program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and Hebrew. He has taught internationally, including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.