

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People
18th Sunday after Pentecost – Year C

RCL Readings – Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7; Psalm 66:1-12; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19

ACNA Readings – Ruth 1:1-19a; Psalm 113; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19

Introduction. The Fall Feasts of the Lord began with Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year. This commenced a time of repentance and seeking to repair broken relationships with our fellow man. During these Days of Awe, the Jewish people sought forgiveness from each other before approaching God on Yom Kippur seeking to restore the relationship with the Lord of Heaven. This period of sombre repentance, atonement and forgiveness concludes with the eight-day celebration of Sukkot. Sukkot is a time of joy and one of the only occasions in which God takes control of our emotions and commands us to happy (Lev 23:40). Sukkot reminds us that, despite the hardships and trials we may go through, we can indeed have the joy of our salvation.

Common Theme. Our readings this week reflect on some of the amazing things that God has done. The Gospel describes miraculous healings. The Epistle reminds us of the hope and joy of resurrection, and the Psalm calls on all peoples of earth to worship for his wondrous deeds. But not all of the Lord's dealings with his people are positive. In Jeremiah, we see that God is also a divine judge, and yet even within judgment, there is the promise of peace and prosperity. God brings joy and restoration even from times of difficulty and adversity and that redemption is available to all peoples.

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7. Chapter 29 of Jeremiah is a letter of correspondence from the prophet to the exiles in Babylon. The survivors of the destruction of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar are encouraged by Jeremiah to not resist the Babylonian Empire. In what might seem quite a turnaround, given that the Jewish people are now captives, the word of the Lord instructs them to seek prosperity amidst their adversity. God had brought judgement upon Israel through the hand of Babylon. However, exile did not mean that God had abandoned his people. The Lord desired that his people now flourish as they had done so in Egypt before the exodus. God still had plans for the nation of Israel, and so the Jewish captives were to pray for their captors and to seek Babylon's prosperity thus enhancing their own prosperity. Israel was to be a blessing to whomever and wherever they went, even when that was during exile. God can always bring good out of evil.

Psalm 66:1-12. In an uncharacteristic fashion, this psalm is called both a psalm and a song. It is also the first psalm since Psalm 50 not to ascribe King David as the author. The psalm begins with a universal call to give glory to God. The book of Psalms is filled with songs and prayers used by the Jewish people in worship of the Lord. Yet they also call upon the Gentiles to come and worship the Lord alongside them. The Psalms acknowledge that God is not only the God of Israel but of the whole world. In like fashion, Psalm 66 opens with an encouragement for “all the earth” to come and see the wondrous deeds of the Lord and, in response, to worship God. Verse 3 actually gives the worshipper the words to say to praise the Lord: ‘Say to God, How awesome are your deeds’. Faith is also an action, and worship is not just something you think or feel emotionally towards God; you also ‘say’ something. God already knows how awesome his deeds are, so why would he need us to say so? Perhaps simply because he delights to hear our voices. Or perhaps, as Jesus said, it's not

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what goes in your mouth that's important, it's what comes out. We know how we really think and feel when we listen to our prayers. What are we saying to God these days?

2 Timothy 2:8-15. Paul summarizes the Gospel for us in one sentence: Jesus Christ is raised from the dead. This is the good news in its purest form. Without the resurrection, there is no gospel, just some nice stories about a Jewish rabbi who went around healing and teaching. The resurrection proves everything said, done, proclaimed, and taught by Jesus to be true. In verses 11-14, Paul may be quoting a simple confession of faith or summary of the gospel that was familiar to the Christian community at the time. Paul encourages Timothy to continue to remind people of these truths. God has done amazing things through the resurrection of the Messiah. The simple creed stated by Paul begins with the promise of resurrection for those who have died with Jesus. This of course begs the question: how do we die with Jesus? The most common way for the majority of followers of Jesus is through baptism. In Romans 6:5, Paul describes us as having been 'united with Jesus in death' and therefore united with him in life through the resurrection. Unfortunately, we are warned by Jesus in John 16 that persecution will come and some will suffer martyrdom. In that sense, it is a literal dying with and for the Lord. Paul assures the faithful who endure of an eternal reward that comes to the believers: the promise to reign with Jesus. The reward to reign is obviously greater than the present suffering and serves as the encouragement to continue against adversity. Incredible joy awaits the followers of Jesus. And that joy can be experienced now through the Spirit that gives peace, takes away anxiety, and helps us endure difficult times.

Luke 17:11-19. As Jesus continues his journey towards Jerusalem, Luke records an encounter with 10 lepers who have congregated outside a nameless border village between Samaria and Jewish Galilee. Leprosy, like other skin diseases, put the afflicted person in a state of ritual impurity. In the Jewish mind, spiritual impurity could also be transferred as could physical contamination of disease. On a practical note, the Torah (Lev 13 and Num 5) required all those with skin diseases to avoid social contact, so we see them here standing at a distance. This group of lepers is an ethnic mix of Jews and Samaritans bonded together in their miserable affliction. Somehow they have heard of Jesus and perhaps are aware of his miracles of healing, so together they beg for mercy. Without touching them or performing any obvious sign of healing, Jesus instructs them to go to the priests. According to the Torah, the priesthood was responsible to discern if a person's skin affliction was indeed healed and announce whether they could rejoin society. The text implies that the lepers are not healed immediately but rather the leprosy leaves them as they seek out the local priests. The story of the healing takes a twist when only the Samaritan returns to Jesus to give gratitude. The relationship between Jews and Samaritans was problematic at best. Animosity between them was fierce and longstanding, culminating with the Maccabean kings destroying the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim. Again we see the gospel being counter-cultural in that everyone received the same opportunity for healing. Jesus informs the Samaritan that his 'faith' made him well. What faith is Jesus referring to here? Surely Jesus is not saying that the faith of all religions is the same? As we have mentioned many times during these sermon notes, faith (*emunah* in Hebrew) is a verb. The lepers faithfully sought out the priests, and it is during that action that they were healed. One ponders what would have happened had they not sought the priests but rather just stayed outside the village

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waiting for Jesus to heal them. Faith, healing, and the joy of restoration was and is available to all peoples. This is indeed good news.

ACNA Readings

Ruth 1:1-19a. In Jewish tradition, the book of Ruth is read during the festival of Shavuot or Pentecost. The book opens by describing a troubling situation. Famine causes a Jewish family from Bethlehem to move to Moab, a pagan enemy nation. God had promised the Jewish people that they would receive abundant rainfall and would dwell in the land of Israel securely if they followed his instructions. The famine indicates that Israel was being disobedient and was suffering the consequences of her unbelief. Things get even worse when all the males of the family die. Naomi returns to Bethlehem accompanied by her Moabite daughter-in-law. Naomi and the daughter-in-law are impoverished, both physically and spiritually and, in a patriarchal society, have little hope for the future. It is when things seem to be at rock bottom that we see the faith and virtue of Ruth who proclaims her love and allegiance to Naomi and to the God of Israel. The redemptive story of Ruth ends in the joy of restoration, marriage, new birth, and the ultimate hope of the Messiah.

Psalm 113. This psalm again reflects the universal dominion of God over all the peoples of the world. Israel, as the covenant nation of God, is described as the 'servants of the Lord'. They are the first that are called upon to praise the Lord. They are followed by everyone else, wherever the sun rises to wherever it sets. The psalm describes the Lord as majestic, powerful, and great among the nations. Yet in his highness and loftiness, God has concern for the lowly and poor among the people. In all situations where things are wrong, the Lord comes and makes them right. The barren woman becomes fertile and the poor are provided for and join the community of the prosperous. For a time the situation was miserable but the Lord brought joy and redemption. This is a psalm of hope, and hope is something our fallen world really needs at the moment.

About the author. The Rev. Aaron Eime is a deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and a 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.