

Sermon Notes from CMJ
20th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

RCL Readings – Job 23:1-9, 16-17; Psalm 22:1-15; Hebrews 4:12-16; Mark 10:17-31

ACNA Readings – Amos 5:6-15; Psalm 90; Hebrews 3:1-6; Mark 10:17-31

Introduction. Unfortunately, we cannot remain innocent children forever. Eventually, as we grow into adulthood, we encounter the grim reality of pain and suffering in our world. When that encounter occurs, it changes our perspective on the world. It can cause some theological consternation. We believe that God is sovereign, and he is in control. How then does he endure the existence of evil, and how do I endure suffering when it comes upon me?

Common Theme. Our readings this week wrestle with the enduring of suffering. Some texts struggle with what we do when we feel that God is remote and distant. Hebrews will remind us that Jesus has shared our struggles, that he is close and can sympathize with our personal conflicts. The Gospel passage will remind us that wealth does not spare us from uncertainty and feeling distant from God.

Job 23:1-9, 16-17. The suffering of Job has been intense. His children have died; his property has been stolen; and his body wracked by disease. His despair is further compounded by the poor advice of his friends who slander him, saying he must have committed some wickedness. Despite his anguish, Job wants to find God and come into his presence. On one hand, this represents the noble quality of Job in that, through all the suffering, he does not abandon God but instead desires to seek after the Lord. On the other hand, his harsh experiences have led Job to the point where he now feels separated from the Lord. He does not feel that God is with him and feels he is alone. Job indicates that he has diligently looked everywhere for God during his distress. Job says he searched forwards, backwards, left or right, but he cannot perceive where God is or what the Lord is doing. I appreciate the honesty of Job. Trying to fathom the meaning of personal suffering is difficult. Trying to explain to those suffering that the Lord is with them when they feel totally abandoned is more so. Job expresses frustration over his lack of audience with God. In faith, Job believes that God knows him to be an upright man and that God will judge fairly in his favour.

Psalm 22:1-15. This was an important psalm for the early believers in Jesus. Jesus obviously quoted it directly while he was on the cross, and much of the imagery in the psalm appears to reference the crucifixion in detail. Psalms can be read in a messianic way revealing prophetic references to the Messiah. But they are also real prayers for personal situations. The Psalms are the prayer book of the Jewish people. There are psalms for all circumstances and emotions. There are psalms of praise, rejoicing as well as of sadness and despair. And this psalm is helpful for us when we need a prayer to relate to during a difficult time in our lives. The psalm begins with an abrupt appeal from someone who knows the Lord and yet now feels abandoned by God. The question ‘why have you forsaken me?’ is a heart wrenching cry from someone who knew the presence of God and cannot explain what is happening to them or why God appears to be gone. The psalm does not attempt to provide an answer for the present condition but appeals to sacred history for comfort. In verses 4-5, David remembers that God had

Sermon Notes from CMJ
20th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

answered and delivered many times in the past. The forefathers had trusted the Lord, and God had delivered them. We can have hope that God, who is the same yesterday, today and forever, will not leave us to shame and despair, but indeed will hear our cry and come to us during our trials.

Hebrews 4:12-16. In the Job passage, it was Job himself who wanted to have an audience with God, both to give his side of the story and to understand what God was doing. In Hebrews, it says that everyone will stand before the Lord and give account, whether we want to or not. When it is our time to appear before the throne, we will not be able to hide a single thing; as Hebrews declares, all is laid bare. The concept that God knows our inner thoughts and desires is well attested in Jewish literature. For example, the prophet Jeremiah wrote, ‘You, Lord Almighty, who judge righteously and test the heart and the mind’ (Jer 11:20). No thing, thought or deed is hidden from the Lord, and no one person is hidden either. This might seem quite scary, that all sins and faithless disobedience do not go unnoticed, but it also means that we are never actually alone from God. He notices us when we suffer and endure trials, and that fact can be quite comforting.

Hebrews goes on to say that the good news is that we have someone, the Messiah, who can sympathize with our situation. He can relate to our suffering because he too suffered and endured weakness. Jesus can empathize with our weakness and temptations even as he remains sinless. Our sin still needs to be dealt with as much as suffering does. The Hebrew Scriptures speak frequently of God’s compassion and love in terms of mercy. The word mercy in Hebrew is רַחֲמִים (*rechamim*), from the word רַחַם (*rechem*) which means ‘womb’. This speaks of God’s love on a tender and deep intimate level. Jesus has suffered, endured and overcome to sit enthroned in heaven. He can relate compassionately with our situation as we approach him for tender mercy. He helps us endure and remain faithful in suffering, while also providing grace and mercy to deal with our sin.

Mark 10:17-31. The Gospel passage shows an account of someone who ends up in a place of sadness and despair, though not due to physical discomfort and suffering, but because he was rich. This story of the rich man and the Kingdom of God appears in all the Synoptic Gospels. The teaching that wealth may be a hindrance to someone’s entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven is wrestled with in all the Gospels. There is a tension between riches and the kingdom. Moses says in Deuteronomy 8:18, ‘And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to get wealth, and so confirms his covenant’. Yet Paul warns Timothy that ‘the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil’ (1 Tim 6:10). Things have not changed so much in our modern Church culture. We pray for God’s blessing, and we thank Him for the many blessings we do have. Much of those blessings have a monetary value to them, like houses, cars and other possessions. And yet the teaching of Jesus is still clear, ‘It is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven’, giving an example that it is easier for a camel to go through the ‘eye of a needle’. I have read suggestions that the eye of the needle was referring to a narrow gate at the city entrance where a camel was stripped of its cargo in order for it to pass through on its knees. I confess that in my 22 years in Jerusalem, I have not seen a single ancient gate or piece of archaeology that

Sermon Notes from CMJ
20th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

supports this theory. The rich man knew God and followed the commandments, thus he was not ignorant of the Lord. Jesus went right to the heart of the issue for the rich man, but not in a harsh, cruel way. Instead, Jesus saw the man with eyes of compassion and love. Jesus knew the inner struggles of the rich man and perhaps could see the emptiness, and dare I say, loneliness in the man's life. Jesus knew the burdens that wealth had placed upon the man and, in love, gave him the opportunity to cast those burdens aside. In contrast to the wealth of the rich man, the disciples tell Jesus that they have already forsaken everything. This was true. Jesus knows both the situation of the rich and poor alike. Jesus reminds that there will be rewards and honour given to those who have followed the Lord. Whatever is given up for the sake of Jesus and his kingdom will be returned many times over, and the final reward will be everlasting life.

ACNA Readings

Amos 5:6-15. Amos delivers a stern warning from God mixed with the hope of redemption, which is not uncommon in biblical prophecy. The warning is directed to those who oppress and cause others to suffer. They oppress the righteous and deprive the poor of justice. The warning is forceful, with God describing himself as a devouring fire. At the same time as the warning, there is the call to repentance. 'Seek good and not evil', says Amos, 'that you may live'. The reward of answering the call to repent is the presence of the Lord himself. In the words of Amos, 'the Lord God Almighty will be with you'.

Psalm 90. Psalm 90 is the only psalm to be attributed to Moses. The journey through the wilderness could not have been an easy one for the people of Israel, with the many hardships the desert can offer. However, Israel was not alone. They did have the presence of God dwelling in the Tabernacle and journeying with them. Moses declares that God is 'our dwelling place throughout all generations'. God's presence through our struggles does not begin and end with the Exodus but continues until the present day, a comforting thought. The psalm ponders some of the consequences to our actions and that some suffering is a result of 'our secret sins', all of which eventually come to light.

According to Jewish exegesis, this psalm hints that God created repentance even before he created the world. Verse 3 says people return to dust and from there God says, 'return'. The word 'return' has the same root as 'repent' (שׁוּב). One possible reading is that before the world was made, God knew that humans would fall into sin. They would be engulfed in disasters of their own making, and this would cause others to suffer. So before all that happened, God said to humanity, 'Repent!' In Jewish theology, God had provided the solution even before the problem began. God always has an answer to our problems (compare with Rev. 13:8, 'the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world').

Hebrews 3:1-6. It is unusual for us to think of Jesus as an apostle. We are more used to thinking of Jesus as our great High Priest. I cannot recall any modern liturgies that address the Messiah as the Apostle.

Sermon Notes from CMJ
20th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

Apostle is שליח (*shaliach*) in Hebrew, which means ‘sent one’. In this sense, Jesus is indeed sent from and by his Father. Jesus was faithful to the one who had sent him. He accomplished the tasks for which he was sent. He has received the rewards for doing so and shared those rewards with us. The writer of Hebrews says that ‘we share in the heavenly calling’. As Jesus says, ‘As the Father has sent me now I am sending you’. Jesus was faithful to his calling, and as followers of the Messiah we are expected to also be faithful to the same heavenly calling. The Epistle of Hebrews regularly contrasts Moses and Jesus. Moses was also a faithful servant and a member of the household of God. However, Jesus is greater than Moses and is the creator of that household. Through his faithfulness, Jesus is adding more people into the house, which now includes us. The writer of Hebrews admonishes us that we are part of that household if we ‘hold on to our courage and hope’. When we endure suffering, some of the dangers include surrendering our hope to despair and giving up our calling and place as ‘holy brethren’ in the people of God. This is both a personal call and a community one. As brothers and sisters in the Lord, we need to encourage each other to remain faithful, helping each other see the Lord in difficult situations and enduring each other’s burdens. The reward is too good to miss out on – life everlasting.

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.