

Sermon Notes from CMJ
Fifth Sunday in Lent / Passion Sunday - Year B

Readings - Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-13; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33

Introduction - *Tikkun olam* (תיקון עולם, repair the world) is a dominant concept in modern Judaism. It refers to individual acts of redemption, good deeds, and love that make a small portion of the world a better place. We arrive at the last week of Lent, with Holy Week and Easter right around the corner. Our readings continue to prepare us for the trial and execution of Jesus. The paradox is Jesus is about to repair creation. His individual sacrifice and death will result in resurrection and life on a universal scale; the mystery of the cross will indeed repair the world.

Common Theme - One of the major Lenten practices has been the giving up of something to get more of God. And while one of the focuses of Lent has been turning away from sin, in the action of turning *away* from something, our desire should be to turn more *towards God*. This theme runs through our readings today at both the individual and national levels.

First Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34 - Jeremiah prophesies the incredible promise of the new covenant in which the Torah will be internalized on the hearts of men. This was more than just a human messianic hope; this was a declaration from God himself. The new covenant is to be made with Israel, the people whom God had redeemed from Egypt, and reflects a national returning to the Lord. The prophecy also contains an individual blessing with the Law being personalized within the hearts and minds of everyone. That is precisely what Moses had always desired, that the Torah should be written on our hearts (Deut 6:6) and not simply tablets of stone. The final result of this new covenant is the restoration of Israel as the people of God. Verse 34 says, “I will be their God and they will be my people;” the relationship will be repaired.

Second Reading: Psalm 51:1-13 - Possibly one of the best-known Psalms of David, these words of contrition have been used in liturgies of repentance in both Christian and Jewish prayers for centuries. “I know my transgressions” is an acknowledgement that we have indeed sinned and that we have a problem. “Blot out my transgressions” expresses our need and desire for those sins to be erased. In turning away from sin, David seeks more than forgiveness; he seeks a restored relationship with God. David requests that the joy of God’s salvation would be restored and that he would be allowed to retain the Holy Spirit. David will not remain passive during the process, and he too will play a part in the journey of restoration. David will teach other sinners the ways of God; he will teach them of God’s mercy, kindness and willingness to forgive. David will share his own experiences and bring God’s redemption to others.

Third Reading: Hebrews 5:5-10 - The Bible tells us very little about Melchizedek. Indeed the character of Melchizedek appears out of context in Genesis 14. Abram was on his way to the King of Sodom and suddenly encountered the King of Salem, with the entire encounter lasting a short four verses. This mysterious encounter created a wealth of speculation and interpretation

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during the Second Temple period. Some Jewish traditions identified him as Shem the son of Noah. The Dead Sea Scrolls community understood Melchizedek to be divine and the Messiah (11QMelch). Similarly, the author of Hebrews saw Melchizedek as the prefiguration of Christ (Hebrews 7:1-17). “In the order of Melchizedek” is a quote from Psalm 110:4. From the text of Genesis, we see that Melchizedek is a Gentile priest of God, which leads to many questions over what type of priesthood is his order exactly? The writer of Hebrews declares Jesus called by God to be our high priest forever. However, Jesus, who is identified with Judah, is not from the tribe of Levi, from which the priestly line usually descends. Jesus shows he is a priest of another order, that of Melchizedek, by his resurrection (Heb 7:16). Hebrews also reminds us that Jesus experienced suffering and learned obedience (Heb 5:8). We are invited in this season of Lent to partake, in part, in that suffering. In returning to the Lord, the source of our salvation, we also partake in the obedience of Jesus. Our walk with the Lord goes beyond the cross; it continues in the path of obedience.

Fourth Reading: John 12:20-33 - Jesus is in the Temple during Passover, most likely in the Jewish area forbidden to non-Jews. It is Philip who is approached by Greek God-fearers to relay a message to Jesus.

Philip is from Bethsaida, a fishing village on the shores of the Galilee. Recent archaeological work in Bethsaida has exposed a Roman temple of the first century, implying that the village quartered both a Jewish and Gentile population. It is possible that Philip (a Greek name) understood Greek better than the other disciples and thus was approached by the Greek speakers to converse with Jesus on their behalf. Jesus, in response, uses the metaphor of dying wheat to reveal that his individual sacrifice will lead many to eternal life. Harvest festivals of many cultures in the ancient world celebrated the life and death cycle of agriculture. Jesus now taught that his death was necessary for his glorification. Jesus also challenges us as his disciples in our nature as servants (*diakonos*). We are called to join in the journey with Jesus, and that includes his struggles and suffering. It would be easy to say, “Jesus is going to the cross so I don’t have to!” However, he says to us, “Follow Me!” Yes, there is a remarkable promise of Jesus if we choose to follow him; Jesus says his “Father will honour him.” The reward for serving Jesus is to receive honour from God the Father. As we head towards the cross, perhaps we should keep these promises and thoughts in mind.

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.