

Sermon Notes from CMJ
5th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

RCL Readings – Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15, 2:23-24; Psalm 30; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43
ACNA Readings – Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Psalm 112; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43

Introduction. “Death is just another path, one that we all must take. The grey rain-curtain of this world rolls back, and all turns to silver glass, and then you see it.” —J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*.

Death is something we all must face and no gluten-free vegan diet, exercise program or amount of money can help us avoid it. Faith takes death seriously. The Bible does not avoid the topic but rather reveals its origin, its future and God’s power over it.

Common Theme. God is life, and in him is no death. The readings this week have much to say about death and God’s power over it. Because death is something that we all must face, it can be a comfort to know and to be reminded that Jesus is the Living One. He faced death in his daily ministry and also suffered it personally, and he overcame all of it. That great adversary that comes to us all has been defeated.

Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15, 2:23-24. On occasion, the lectionary includes texts from the Apocrypha. Apocryphal books are not included in the Hebrew Bible, but they are in the Septuagint and Latin versions of the Old Testament. Thus their usage in Christian tradition is somewhat ambiguous, and their use is often based upon the history of the denomination. The Wisdom of Solomon is a work of the late Second Temple period, not written by Solomon and appearing several generations before Jesus. These texts give us a glimpse into the theology of the world of Jesus. According to Article 6 of the 39 Articles of Religion, the book is not considered to be in the canon of Scripture but is useful to be read for example of life and instruction.

The portion begins with the definitive statement that “God did not make death.” Contrary to popular evolutionary science, the theological view is that death is not a natural part of the world. Wisdom of Solomon goes on to say that “God does not delight in death nor did he create things so that they could die. He created them so that they might exist.” Death was introduced into the creation and was not an inherent part of it. We were created in God’s image, and God has no death or decay in him. Many in the Christian world do not read the Genesis narrative as anything more than poetic pictures. Salvation is not dependent on how you read the Bible, but ponder this problem: if Adam and Eve do not exist as real people then when and where does the Fall of Man occur? As Paul writes in Romans 5:12, “sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people.” The resurrection has brought victory over death, yet death still abides in this world for a time. Revelation 20:14 describes the last things to be cast into the eternal fire will be Death and Hades.

Psalm 30. This psalm is a song of life attributed as a dedication prayer of King David. David was a military man whose career was replete with warfare, giants, battles and possibly a few narrow escapes

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from death. He knew what it was to have enemies and to live with death as a constant companion. David praises the Lord as the source of his health and life. David also knew that he was not immortal and that pragmatically all things must eventually meet death. The psalm adds a spiritual component in verse 3 where David says that God brings his “soul” back from the grave. God has restored not only David’s physical life but also David’s spiritual life. This spiritual aspect, in my opinion, not only obliges David to praise the Lord for his deliverance but, in verse 4, it drives him to compel others to do the same.

At the time of David, the Bible did not have much to say regarding the underworld and what happened beyond the grave. The prevailing view was that the dead did not do much and certainly could not praise the Lord in a meaningful fashion. Death was a very real and seemingly permanent enemy that was opposite to the God of life. Yet the psalm ends in verse 12 with the intention to praise the Lord forever. How can this be possible when man is but a mortal? Subtly there is the hope in David’s prayer that the certainty that death itself will not last.

2 Corinthians 8:7-15. Sometimes the lectionary has passages that seem removed from their context and sometimes are not connected to a common theme. Paul has been comparing the poor northern communities in Macedonia with the wealthier southern communities of Corinth as he takes up a collection in support of the Jerusalem community. The poorer northern communities had responded to the call for financial assistance with surprising generosity. It was time for the Corinthian church to also make good on its promises to assist the believers in Jerusalem. Paul says now in verse 8 that he is testing the Corinthian believers in the “genuineness of their love.” There is no direct command to give financial aid in the New Testament. Being forced to give something is more akin to taxation than to the act of generosity. Paul reminds the Corinthians of the generosity of Jesus and how much Jesus gave up for them. Paul encourages the Corinthians, and by extension us too, to mimic the generosity of Jesus. Paul would remind us that, while not legally commanded, we are morally obligated to be sincere in our love. Love needs to be accompanied by our actions, in this case, generosity to the poor.

Mark 5:21-43. Jesus overcomes decay and death in this week’s Gospel passage. In the first instance, Jarius (*Yair* in Aramaic and Hebrew) implores Jesus to come to heal his dying daughter. We note that Jarius is labelled as the “one of the rulers of the synagogue.” At the time of Jesus, rabbis were not in charge of synagogues; they remained on the periphery of society as itinerant teachers. Paul in the book of Acts does not engage with one rabbi in all his missionary journeys.

Jarius is confident that Jesus can heal and requests a laying on of hands. It was a common understanding that physical touch could be a conduit for healing. Jesus consents to go with him to his daughter. Along the way, Jesus has an encounter with a woman with the issue of blood. Her condition would have excluded her from both temple and synagogue worship. Her ostracism from society prompts many commentators to describe her condition as a “social death.” The point is that her body was suffering

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under the “curse” and decay present in the world. The unnamed woman is healed the moment she touches Jesus.

We see that some of the healings recorded in the Gospels are not based on “belief” in Jesus as the Messiah and, as in this instance, do not even require Jesus’ consent. I think it is evident that the woman’s faith was in God and she believed God was acting through Jesus. Jesus comments publicly that the “woman’s faith has made her well,” faith combined with the action of touch. Interestingly Jesus calls her “daughter” as he is journeying to Jarius’ daughter. She had suffered her condition for 12 years, and Jarius’ daughter is also aged 12 years. Coincidence is not a kosher word. Jesus reaches the house of Jarius, and he is told he is too late. The daughter has died. The good news is that Jesus is far stronger than death and, somewhat privately, he brings the daughter back to life.

The combination of these two healings shows us there are no formulas for how God works. Some healings occur privately and others are in public. Sometimes healings are immediate and others take time. Jesus can and does defeat death in all its forms. It is his very nature to defeat death for God is life.

ACNA Addendum

Deuteronomy 15:7-11. The Deuteronomy passage connects to the Epistle reading regarding generosity towards the poor. Compassion for the poor and disenfranchised was considered to be part of the duties of the ruling monarch in the ancient world. Kings, the central government, would spend portions of their tax wealth on social welfare, much like we do today. Ancient kings also could issue proclamations cancelling debts and the like. Here Moses places the obligation to have concern for the poor on everyone, not just the social elites. Moses notes that God has been generous to give Israel the land. He has provided the people of Israel with many blessings, and as a response, Moses urged the people to be open-handed and kind-hearted. Verse 10 also notes that giving generously will invite further blessing from the Lord. Would this solve poverty? Not really! The next verse is even quoted by Jesus in Mark 14:7, “There will always be poor people in the land.” This knowledge was not given to discourage people from giving but instead to spur people to further acts of generosity and love.

Psalm 112. Psalm 111 ends with “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” and Psalm 112 opens with “Blessed are those who fear the Lord.” The fear here is not one of misery or reluctant obligation but rather one of joyful obedience. The happy person is one who delights greatly in the commandments of God. The psalm has much to say about the generosity of the person who fears the Lord. Verse 3 notes that blessing can be in the form of riches and wealth. Prosperity can indeed be a blessing from God that extends from a life that honours the Lord. In honouring the Lord, there is the characteristic of generosity. Verse 5 says that the righteous are those who deal generously; verse 9 says they distribute freely which returns honour to both themselves and to God. Verse 9 is quoted by Paul in 2

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Corinthians 9:9 to encourage the believers to be generous. To fear the Lord also means to reflect his character through willing, delightful and joyful obedience. One aspect of God's character is generosity.

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.