

*Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary*  
Readings, Commentary, and Questions for Discussion for August 18, 2019  
Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 15



**THE READINGS**

**First Reading: Isaiah 5:1-7** *Alternate Jeremiah 23:23-29*

<sup>1</sup> Let me sing for my beloved  
my love-song concerning his vineyard:

My beloved had a vineyard  
on a very fertile hill.

<sup>2</sup> He dug it and cleared it of stones,  
and planted it with choice vines;  
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,  
and hewed out a wine vat in it;  
he expected it to yield grapes,  
but it yielded wild grapes.

<sup>3</sup> And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem  
and people of Judah,  
judge between me  
and my vineyard.

<sup>4</sup> What more was there to do for my vineyard  
that I have not done in it?  
When I expected it to yield grapes,  
why did it yield wild grapes?

<sup>5</sup> And now I will tell you  
what I will do to my vineyard.  
I will remove its hedge,  
and it shall be devoured;  
I will break down its wall,

and it shall be trampled down.  
6 I will make it a waste;  
it shall not be pruned or hoed,  
and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns;  
I will also command the clouds  
that they rain no rain upon it.  
7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts  
is the house of Israel,  
and the people of Judah  
are his pleasant planting;  
he expected justice,  
but saw bloodshed;  
righteousness,  
but heard a cry!

*Worth Noting: Christians have often appropriated the title "the new Israel." How do Isaiah's words apply to this new Israel today?*

**Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19** *Alternate Psalm 82*

1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,  
you who lead Joseph like a flock!  
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth  
2 before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.  
Stir up your might,  
and come to save us!

8 You brought a vine out of Egypt;  
you drove out the nations and planted it.  
9 You cleared the ground for it;  
it took deep root and filled the land.  
10 The mountains were covered with its shade,  
the mighty cedars with its branches;  
11 it sent out its branches to the sea,  
and its shoots to the River.  
12 Why then have you broken down its walls,  
so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?  
13 The boar from the forest ravages it,  
and all that move in the field feed on it.

14 Turn again, O God of hosts;  
look down from heaven, and see;  
have regard for this vine,  
15 the stock that your right hand planted.  
16 They have burned it with fire,  
they have cut it down;

may they perish at the rebuke  
of your countenance.

<sup>17</sup> But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,  
the one whom you made strong for yourself.

<sup>18</sup> Then we will never turn back from you;  
give us life, and we will call on your name.

<sup>19</sup> Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

*Worth Noting: The psalm describes the nation's situation, threatened by extinction by the powerful forces of Assyria. The psalmist implores the God who delivered the people from Egypt to the Promised Land (verses 8-13) to repent (!) to turn again to restore the people's fortunes (verses 14-18). Why should we remind God of past favors?*

### **Second Reading: Hebrews 11:29-12:2**

<sup>29</sup> By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. <sup>30</sup> By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. <sup>31</sup> By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

<sup>32</sup> And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets – <sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

<sup>35</sup> Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. <sup>36</sup> Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented – <sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. <sup>39</sup> Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

<sup>12:1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

*Worth Noting: All the examples cited are of faith/ -fulness in the face of adversity. The first two paragraphs describe successful efforts while the third paragraph describes earthly failures. In the fourth paragraph, what is our relationship with this great cloud of witnesses? Are they simply examples for us to follow or are they more than that?*

### **Gospel: Luke 12:49-56**

<sup>49</sup> [Jesus said to the crowds] “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were

already kindled! <sup>50</sup> I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!

<sup>51</sup> Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! <sup>52</sup> From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; <sup>53</sup> they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

<sup>54</sup> He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain’; and so it happens. <sup>55</sup> And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens. <sup>56</sup> You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

*Worth Noting: Verse 53 reminds us that in Luke’s community the daughter-in-law became a member of her husband’s birth family and was expected to be subject to his parents wishes. In your experience, how can parents-in-law support new marriages and families?*

## CONNECTING WITH THE SCRIPTURES

### Entering into the Scriptures

Jesus’ comment about fire at Luke 12:49 is ambiguous, just because fire is ambiguous, both life-giving and destroying. How did Jesus mean it? Based on many references in the Old Testament, Jesus may have been alluding to a final judgment. God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah with fire (Genesis 19:24). Moses assures the people “Know then today that the LORD your God is the one who crosses over before you as a devouring fire; he will defeat them and subdue them before you, so that you may dispossess and destroy them quickly, as the LORD has promised you” (Deuteronomy 9:3). As proof of the power of the LORD Elijah brought down fire that consumed King Ahaziah’s fifty servants (2 Kings 1:10-14).

Luke’s first hearers, would have been conversant with these stories and would have respected the power of fire. Within their lifetime, most of the city of Rome was destroyed by fire. Smelting to cleanse ores of impurities was a well-known technology. In these commonly experienced situations, calling fire on the earth would be difficult to bear.

But how does this interpretation jibe with the rest of Luke’s narrative? In describing his vocation elsewhere, Jesus talks of redeeming sinners, not destroying them (Luke 5:32; 7:34; 19:10). In the Gospel reading for June 30, the disciples urged Jesus to call down fire on the Samaritan village that would not receive them, but Jesus refused and rebuked them (Luke 9:51-55). There is at least a strain in the Gospel that contradicts the notion that Jesus is calling on fire to destroy humans.

In fact, Luke’s Gentile audience, raised in the midst of a vibrant Greco-Roman culture would know that early Greek philosophers equated fire with the divine. At the time of Jesus their intellectual descendants held that a divine *pneuma*, “spirit” or “breath,” composed of fire and reason (Greek: *logos*) infused all creation. Leveraging off this tradition, Luke associates the Holy Spirit with fire (as in the first Pentecost “tongues of fire.” Acts 2:1-4). Indeed, the Holy Spirit is active throughout Luke-Acts, from the Incarnation (Luke 1:37) to Paul’s final words in Rome (Acts 28:52). Then in the Gospel selection, Jesus shows that

he is anxious to infuse the world with the Holy Spirit.

### **The Next Episode of Biblical Family Values**

If Jesus is calling for the Holy Spirit to infuse the world, what will the world look like? The rest of the Gospel selection describes a world in which generations are pitted against each other, father against son, mother against daughter-in-law. That's a theme not peculiar to the Gospel. Indeed, fiction and non-fiction works tell of children who defy convention to follow a dream, or call, or vocation that takes them away from their family and into a new society. Huckleberry Finn rafts down the Mississippi with a runaway slave, defying family, friends, and society. In the second century, Thecla left family and fiancé to follow Paul, suffer humiliation and torture, and ultimately form a new community of like-minded women.

Thecla's and Huck's stories turned out well: True to themselves they found peace, companionship, and fame. Often, however, we compromise. As rebellious as we might be as teenagers, we defer or modify or reject our dream to maintain peace. We console ourselves with Ephesians' observation that God has prepared good works for our life, no matter what that life might be (Ephesians 2:10). We are "realistic" and we "move on" with our life. The results, sometimes painful sometimes not, have been chronicled by poets, novelists, and playwrights to their financial benefit and the unsettling of our souls.

### **Questions to Prompt Conversation**

Prayers of petition spring from our souls. Should they be formulated to remind us? God? of God's past favors? Do you refer to the "great cloud of witnesses" in this reminiscence?

We spend part of our youth with impossible dreams: I could never ever hit a fast ball (much less a curve ball) or run a four-minute mile. Other dreams get deferred or denied. How do you distinguish between those impossible dreams and true calls to a way of life?

What do you suppose Mary and Joseph told Jesus when he set out his ideas for his life?

If you have put aside possible youthful dreams, can you see the benefits to having done so? Can you resurrect the dreams of your youth later? Have you children? Have they stepped away from the path that you would have them follow? Have you maintained a thriving relationship with them? And we might ask the same questions about siblings.



Dennis Haugh has enjoyed working with adult seekers for over 20 years, promoting engagement with and reflection on the Scriptures. To hone his skills and burnish his credentials, he earned his PhD in Biblical Studies in the University of Denver/Illiff School of Theology joint program. He has been publishing *Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary* since October, 2013 and plans to end his involvement with *Journeying* with the November 24, 2019 posting. Anyone wanting to take it on? More than happy to discuss. As always, he appreciates any correspondence: [dennishaugh2011@gmail.com](mailto:dennishaugh2011@gmail.com).

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