

Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary
Readings, Commentary, and Questions for Discussion for August 25, 2019
Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 16



THE READINGS

First Reading: Jeremiah 1:4-10 *Alternate: Isaiah 58:9b-14 or Proverbs 25:6-7*

⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

⁵ “Before I formed you
in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born

I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

⁶ Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.”

⁷ But the LORD said to me,

“Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’;
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.

⁸ Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.”

⁹ Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me,

“Now I have put my words in your mouth.

¹⁰ See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant.”

Worth Noting: The LORD called Jeremiah to an expansive role, prophecy not just to Judea his homeland, but to the nations, the mighty kingdoms surrounding Judea (verse 5). Can you see why Jeremiah might be reluctant to lean into the assignment? In a culture that revered the elders (“Never trust anyone under 30”), how could Jeremiah be expected to speak to the hierarchy with any hope of success? How do you distinguish true prophets (whatever their age) from false ones? Do you find wisdom in youth?

Psalm 71:1-6 *Alternate Psalm 112*

- ¹ In you, O LORD, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.
- ² In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
incline your ear to me and save me.
- ³ Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.
- ⁴ Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.
- ⁵ For you, O Lord, are my hope,
my trust, O LORD, from my youth.
- ⁶ Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
it was you who took me from my mother's womb.
My praise is continually of you.

Second Reading: Hebrews 12:18-29

¹⁸ You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. ²⁰ (For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death.”)

²¹ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”)

²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³ and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

²⁵ See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! ²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.” ²⁷ This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of what is shaken – that is, created things – so that what cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; ²⁹ for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

Worth Noting: The author alludes to the Sinai experience (verses 18-21) and quotes the prophet Haggai (verse 26) who successfully exhorted the people to rebuild the Temple. Hebrews assumes the audience accepts these Old Testament narratives as Scripture, and writes to supplement them with a new story initiated by Jesus and including a spiritual rather than a temporal mountain and home. The compilers of the Lectionary assume Old Testament narratives still shape Christians, hence the first reading and Psalm from the Old Testament. Which Old Testament story has stuck with you through the years? What has it told you about your relationship with God and others?

Gospel: Luke 13:10-17

¹⁰ Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. ¹¹ And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” ¹³ When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

¹⁴ But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.”

¹⁵ But the Lord answered him and said, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? ¹⁶ And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?”

¹⁷ When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

Worth Noting: Jesus claims the woman was bound by Satan for eighteen years (verse 16). If that were true, wouldn't it make sense to avoid the woman? While modern medical professionals attribute any disability to physical, not spiritual, factors, do you sense any remnant of that thinking in our natural reluctance to engage with the disabled?

CONNECTING WITH THE SCRIPTURES

Entering into the Scriptures

Every year when the Lectionary includes a controversy story about healing on the Sabbath, I feel compelled to set the record straight. No, Jesus did not work on the Sabbath in the healings: stretching out a hand is not work. Yes, there was controversy *within Jewish circles* on what constituted work and how much one could do on the Sabbath. These controversies were resolved many centuries ago. Today, Jewish medical professionals respond to emergencies to save lives, prepare medications for the ill and for those needing medications to forestall illness or control conditions (e.g., diabetes or high blood pressure), and do work to assure the comfort of their patients.

Why was there ever a question about these things? Well, when the God who delivered your nation from slavery, destroyed the opposing army by drowning, and then led your ancestors on a forty year pilgrimage before bringing them into the Promised Land, the same LORD God who established a covenant with your people that includes an agreement to “keep holy the Sabbath,” would you not be careful to “keep holy the Sabbath”? And how exactly would you do that? In other words, disputes about the meaning of the commandment are inevitable. The Gospels record how they played out in first century Palestine.

Luke was not interested in intra-Jewish debates about how to keep the Sabbath. Luke was interested in establishing Jesus as more righteous than the Pharisees and the rightful heir to the mantle of Moses the Lawgiver, for if Jesus is the new Moses, his followers are the new Israel, the rightful heirs to the covenant. Jesus’ disciples, not those who gather in Synagogues throughout the Roman empire, would be the legitimate Jews, protected by the Roman

concessions to the Jewish people.

**“My disability exists not because I use a wheelchair
but because the broader environment isn’t accessible.” Stella Young**

In this week’s Gospel selection, Jesus schools us on deep hospitality. In the first century, when Luke wrote the Gospel, to be deformed, bent over, unable to walk upright and destined to always be facing the ground, was to be considered less than human. To restore her to health and to community, Jesus did three things. First Jesus saw her, really saw her. Then Jesus called her from the place she was hiding from the stares and sneers of the crowd. Finally, Jesus restored her: Not to a fullness of humanity, which she never had lost, but to full communion with the community.

Christians call themselves the Body of Christ. Then the Body of Christ is composed of broken bodies, bodies in constant pain, that limp, cannot see or hear; bodies with injured brains and emotions. Jesus did not love the woman he healed any more after the healing than he did before. Before she was his sister; afterwards too. This healing taught his power over creation and reinforced the sense of his mission of restoring right relationships.

Christians call themselves the hands and feet of Christ in the world. To be the hands and feet of Christ would be to do as Christ did: to repair the imperfections of afflicted bodies and to build tight relationships with all, regardless of their abilities. Community supported medical care, handicapped parking spaces, entrance ramps, and expanded bus service are visible signs of our commitment to be the body of Christ. Looking, seeing, touching those who need help: the first step in all of that.

Questions to Prompt Conversation

Often, we are told to be as a little child but we avert our eyes from those whose development has been stunted. Might it be that those of us with “superior intelligence” will be so blessed in the Kingdom?

Is there one wisdom of the youth and another of the elder? How would you describe them? How have you held onto the wisdom of the youth as you acquire the wisdom of the elder?

Wise people tell us that suffering can break our hearts and minds open to the suffering in the world. Why then does suffering sometimes just break us and leave us embittered? Do you know people who have endured suffering to be wiser and kinder and others who have become angry and antisocial? What has been your experience with suffering?



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/Iliff 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 want to take it on? More than happy to discuss. As always, he appreciates any correspondence: dennishaugh2011@gmail.com.

Unless expressly stated otherwise, all quotations from Scripture are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

*“Jesus Healing Woman with Infirmity” from *Vivre et Croire*.*

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