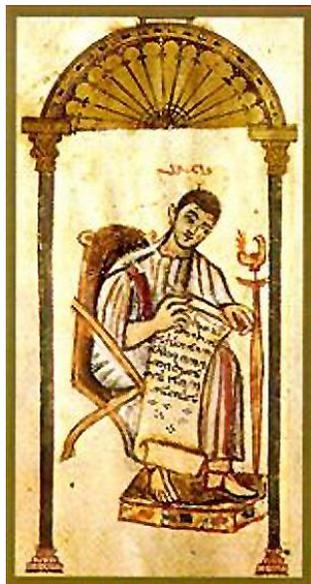


Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary
Readings, Commentary, and Discussion Questions for August 26, 2018
Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 16



THE READINGS

First Reading: 1 Kings 8:(1, 6, 10-11), 22-30, 41-43 *Alternate Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18*

[¹ Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. . . . ⁶ Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. . . .

¹⁰ And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, ¹¹ so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.]

²² Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. ²³ He said, “O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, ²⁴ the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand. ²⁵ Therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that which you promised him, saying, “There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.” ²⁶ Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David.

²⁷ “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! ²⁸ Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, O LORD my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; ²⁹ that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you

said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place.³⁰ Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive. . . .

⁴¹ "Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name⁴² – for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm – when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house,⁴³ then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built."

Worth Noting: Solomon's prayer is remarkable. It acknowledges that we cannot build temples, or churches, or synagogues, or mosques that will hold God (verses 27-30). It also recognizes that the LORD, the God of Israel is also the God of other nations (verses 41-43). How does your community honor these same principles, of an infinite God who hears the prayers of people of all nations?

Psalm 84 *Alternate: Psalm 34:15-22*

¹ How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!

² My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.

³ Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.

⁴ Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise.

⁵ Happy are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

⁶ As they go through the valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.

⁷ They go from strength to strength;
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

⁸ O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob!

⁹ Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed.

¹⁰ For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than live in the tents of wickedness.
¹¹ For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
he bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does the LORD withhold
from those who walk uprightly.
¹² O LORD of hosts,
happy is everyone who trusts in you.

Worth Noting: The psalmist echoes a theme from the book of Isaiah that as the LORD leads the people from exile back to Zion the desert will bloom (Isaiah 35:1-10; 43:10-20), with a significant change: Psalm 84 claims that the passing by of the people themselves will water and restore the desert. How does your community go about repairing the world?

Second Reading: Ephesians 6:10-20

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵ As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Worth Noting: "Struggle," "stand firm," "put on the armor of God," Sounds like the Ephesians were in for a tough time. Does your community see itself threatened? If so, by whom? If not, why not?

Gospel: John 6:56-69

⁵⁶ [Jesus continued] "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever."

⁵⁹ He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. ⁶⁰ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?"

⁶¹ But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where

he was before?⁶³ It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.⁶⁴ But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him.

⁶⁵ And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.”

⁶⁶ Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.

⁶⁷ So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?”

⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.⁶⁹ We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Worth Noting: With this incident, Jesus ends his ministry in Galilee, not at a moment of astounding success (such as after feeding the 5,000) but while losing “many of his disciples.” Has your community lost members over questions of principled discipleship? How does your community recover?

CONNECTING WITH THE SCRIPTURES

Entering into the Scriptures

In the Gospel of John, miracles are symbols of Jesus’ deeper reality which are meant to lead to belief in Jesus (John 2:11; 6:30; 7:31). Belief is an intermediate step to knowing Jesus and the Father (John 8:19; 10:38). (That Jesus knows the Father [John 7:29; 8:55; 10:15; 17:25] but never “believes” in him emphasizes the superiority of knowledge to faith.) Not that the sequence always goes well. After the feeding of the 5,000, for example, the crowd wanted more food while Jesus wanted them to see that the miracle pointed to himself as the bread of life (John 6:30, 66; see also 12:37). For John, belief is more often than not belief *into* Jesus. It is an active verb of engaging with Jesus, taking on his persona in his word and works.

The knowledge that proceeds from faith is not simply intellectual cognition but the culmination of the work of taking on the mind and will of Jesus. For John, to know God the Father and the one whom he sent, Jesus, is supremely relational. Jesus’ first disciples, curious to know him, asked “Teacher, where do you abide?” to which Jesus replied “Come and see” (John 1:38-39, our translation). It will be recalled that “remaining” and “abiding” with Jesus are distinctive in the Gospel of John. “To abide” connotes a sense of some permanence, of commitment, here to a person. Further, the Hebrew verb *yada*, “to know,” often goes beyond the simply intellectual knowledge to the experience of an intimate relationship. It is to this degree of intimacy that Jesus invites his followers when he asks that they know him and the Father.

It’s Not Life *or* Death, It’s Life *and* Death

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus describes himself as the one who brings life to the world: the bread of life, living water, the light of the world. As we have seen in our weekly comments, there is a tension within chapter 6 between the view that *only* the words of Jesus, the Word, make present the Father who sent him, and the view that *only* the Eucharistic sacrament of bread and wine make Jesus present. The former view awaits the

resurrection of the believers to be finally united with Jesus; the latter prefigures and insures this final unification in the partaking of Jesus' true body and blood. The Christian genius ultimately rejects of false "either-or" dichotomies in favor of "both-and" inclusiveness. Soon enough the early Christians adopted an order of worship that included both word and sacrament: reading and reflecting on Scripture followed by a ritual meal re-membering Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. These two actions are linked by reciting the Creed, the Christian community's expression of an ever developing, always imperfect understanding of God's life-giving work. Seen as a continuous movement, then, in the Christian liturgy, Scripture elicits the faith expressed in the Creed that looks to union with Christ through the Sacrament. Another way to put it: The words of Scripture point to God's mighty deeds, extolled in the Creed, that symbolize God's ongoing life-giving work including, in the absence of the physical Jesus, provision of his sacramental body and blood.

Questions for Discussion

Solomon knew he couldn't keep God in his temple. Then what was, and is, the point of building a magnificent place to worship?

Other questions for your next liturgy committee meeting: How do symbols work? What is *the* primary symbol of your Sunday liturgy? (The choir? The entrance doors? The Bible? The altar table? The cross?) To what does this symbol point? Should that be the primary symbol?

Does your community honor or revere Word over Sacrament or vice versa? How do you know?

Peter and the apostles stayed with Jesus because they realized he has the words of eternal life (John 6:68). Do you see eternal life as the primary reason to be Christian? Some blame Christians for ignoring the needs of this world in favor of hoped-for eternal life. How does your community understand the relationship between the needs of this world and the desire for eternal life?

We need your help. Language about God is important, since how we address God colors our relationship with God. (How would your attitude change from praying to the Almighty Creator to praying to My Best Friend?) In the essays this week, we have broken our usual practice of using gender neutral language of God to refer to God as the Father, the language of the Fourth Gospel. We grant that this may represent a lack of effort and/or imagination on our part. But please: Look back at the essay "Entering into the Scriptures." Can you suggest how else we might talk of God, especially in relationship with Jesus? Send your thoughts, on Facebook or email at dennishaugh2011@gmail.com. Thank you.



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