



SEASON OF CREATION

Lectionary Notes for Season of Creation 2019

Revised Common Lectionary, Year C

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September 1, 2019 – 12th Sunday after Pentecost/World Day of Prayer for Creation

Jeremiah 2:4-13, Psalm 81:1, 10-16; Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14: 1, 7-14

We open Season of Creation with the words of God's reproachful lament in Jeremiah: "I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination." The Creator of all has provided humankind with plenty. Yet instead of receiving the fruits of creation as a gift from a loving Creator, we have seized them for ourselves with rapacity. In the process, humans have defiled God's earth, an ongoing act of sacrilege and lack of faith in God's sustenance. Ironically, though much of this has been done in the name of "profit," God describes the result as "of no profit," like a cracked cistern that can hold no water. As wildfires and droughts rage across the planet, we see ever more vividly how the false gods of self, profit, and convenience have proven to be broken cisterns, and how we have turned away from God and the abundance God gives to us through creation. Oh, that we would listen to God's voice!

By contrast, both the Epistle and the Gospel call us to a different kind of economy, one that receives the Creator's gifts with humility, trusting in God's provision. Receiving the goods of the earth as a gift, we are able to share that gift freely with others, even or especially with those who cannot repay us.

September 8, 2019 – 13th Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 18:1-11; Psalm 129:1-6, 13-18; Philemon 1:1-21; Luke 14:25-33

The scope of the environmental crisis facing us can be paralyzing. We may feel that it is too late to do anything to halt climate change or species extinction anyway, so why bother trying? Alternatively, some might feel that God – or possibly technological innovation – will solve our problems for us (either Deus or a deus ex machina). Jeremiah's lesson at the potter's house shows us the limitations of both ways of thinking. Like the potter, God is actively involved in our world; but our actions have consequences as well, and can change the outcome. The call is clear: "Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings."

This turn will not be without sacrifice. It will disrupt our lives, our societal systems, and our relationships. Yet the Gospel challenges the supremacy of all these things – not to make our lives more austere and barren but to open us to the joy of abundant life in Christ. Paul appeals to Philemon to receive Onesimus as a beloved brother rather than as a runaway slave, overturning the social order of the Roman Empire. But rather than commanding Philemon to do so, Paul appeals to him out of love, urging Philemon to choose a new way. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "Grace is *costly* because it calls us to follow, and it is *grace* because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ."

September 15, 2019 – 14th Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28; Psalm 14; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10

Jeremiah declares God's judgement upon Jerusalem. The ecological disaster (echoing the pre-creation chaos of Genesis 1:2 – "lo, it was waste and void") points to the devastating consequences of human disobedience. A similar note of judgement is heard in Psalm 14: "They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse; there is no one who does good, no, not one." Yet God will not make a full end. God is a God of deliverance, mercy, and restoration, beyond anything we have a right to expect.

All of us are in need of God's deliverance; each one of us is the lost sheep. Those of us who have had exposure to God's word are not exempt from captivity to evil; indeed, we are even more in need of deliverance, as the apostle Paul acknowledges of himself. United Methodist pastor Brandon Wrencher reminds us that "Self-righteousness lies ready to re-enforce the bondage from which the oppressed are set free... Liberation and mercy are needed. Liberation frees us. Mercy forgives us."

God who can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine, deliver us from our captivity to the powers of evil and death, and restore us to new life in Jesus Christ. Amen.

September 22, 2019 – 15th Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; Psalm 79:1-9; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13

When disaster overtakes us, the appropriate first response is lament. Our hearts are sickened by what has been lost, and we are driven to weep. Speaking to the people of Jerusalem, Jeremiah reminds them of the part they have played in bringing things to this point, though that does not take away from his grief. And the Psalmist continues to entreat God for deliverance. Though we may have failed ourselves and others, there is One who does not fail.

When environmental disaster overtakes us, we lament – but not for ourselves alone. Invariably those who suffer the most from environmental disaster are the most vulnerable: Inuit and other peoples who depend most directly on the land for survival; subsistence farmers most vulnerable to drought or flooding; poor people in urban areas who cannot afford air-conditioning, private pools, or escape to cottages and resorts. Those who have done the least to contribute to climate change are the most directly affected by its impacts.

In that light, we turn to the parable of the shrewd manager in today's Gospel. The unscrupulous steward, realizing that the end is near, chooses to do what he can to minimize the impact of the coming judgement. However, in doing so he makes things easier for those in debt to his master.

Jesus' commendation of the shrewd manager is startling, accustomed as we are to seeing faithfulness, honesty and diligence as worthy of praise. But Jesus' description of the master's goods as "dishonest wealth" – literally, *mammon* – reminds us that the master in the parable is not God, but the economic systems of this world. The steward disrupts his master's economy for his own gain, but in the process alleviates the suffering of others. So too we are called to disrupt the worldly economic systems that oppress others, not for an immediate but an eternal reward. "This is cheating the world's system for the sake of the kingdom's system: of living now in this age, as citizens of the kingdom of heaven!" (Brandon Wrencher, pastor of The Good Neighbour Movement of the United Methodist Church.)

In the face of looming environmental disaster, how can we use the tools of our existing systems to disrupt those systems' exploitation of creation and oppression of the most vulnerable in our midst?

September 29, 2019 – 16th Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15; Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16; 1 Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31

Want to buy some swampland in Florida? Jeremiah's purchase of his cousin Hanamel's field at Anathoth makes about as much sense. Jerusalem is under siege, and this field is behind enemy lines. Yet the purchase of this field – publicly signed, sealed and witnessed – signifies an audacious hope in the face of the imminent collapse of the established regime. Houses and fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land. The redeemed shall sit under their own vines and fig trees and not be afraid. God will wipe away all tears.

God is dependable, even when the world is not. The New Testament readings urge those who have wealth not to set their desires on it, nor to put their trust in it, but to use it for the relief of others. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus reminds us that our opportunity to do so, like wealth itself, is limited. Everything we own – everything to which we claim we're entitled – is a gift from God, and as such, is to be shared.

October 6, 2019 – 17th Sunday after Pentecost

Lamentations 1:1-6; Lamentations 3:19-26 or Psalm 137; 2 Timothy 1:1-14; Luke 17:5-10

It has happened. The destruction of Jerusalem, foretold by Jeremiah, has come to pass. And yet, in the middle of the lament, in the third chapter of Jeremiah, there springs forth confidence in God's faithfulness and mercy: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." Even in the midst of desolation, we declare our trust in God who re-creates anew.

In the face of the climate crisis, it is easy to give way to fear. Yet climate scientist and evangelical Christian Katherine Hayhoe counters that fear by reminding believers of 2 Timothy 1:7: "What God has given us is a spirit of love, power and a sound mind.... Although we don't know the day and the hour, we are not to sit on our hands waiting for [Christ] to return, and we are certainly not to tremble in fear. We are to do good works, which includes loving and caring for others. And today, that includes addressing global issues like climate change that disproportionately impact the most vulnerable of us." (interview in *The Christian Century*, Feb. 26, 2018).

It may seem like a leap of faith – but, as Jesus assures his disciples, we already have enough faith. We simply need to do what is before us to do – what God has commanded us from the beginning – and take care of the earth and each other.