

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

*September 15, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin*

## **Commentary on Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The "hot wind" from the north in Jeremiah will be both literally and figuratively. From the north will come the Babylonian invasion which will mean disaster and devastation. This ultimate invasion, however, will be preceded by a severe drought. In Jeremiah 3:3, the judgment of LORD will come in the form of drought, "the showers have been withheld, and the spring rain has not come" and in Jeremiah 14, "Because there has been no rain on the land the farmers are dismayed; they cover their heads. .... Can any idols of the nations bring rain?" Where in the time of Noah, God's judgment was too much rain, Jeremiah will experience destruction through the "hot wind" of drought. This drought will strip away creation from the fruitful land and the wildlife of the air to the destruction of the cities and the mountains until there is only waste and void as it was at the beginning of creation. Even in the midst of this seemingly total destruction, God promises not to "make a full end". There is still time to repent but judgment is coming.

## **Commentary on 1 Timothy 1:12-17** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

This brief account of Paul's conversion experience in Damascus not only reinforces Paul's authority as an apostle but can also be viewed as a word of encouragement to Timothy. By pointing out his own mistakes in his younger days, Paul is telling Timothy that it is not by his strength but by Christ Jesus that ministry is made possible. Paul's themes of grace, faith, and love are pulled together in the saving act of Jesus Christ. Rather than emphasizing his worthiness, Paul focuses on his sinfulness. The reason for this is to point out that according to the Law, all are sinful and none are saved. But through the power of Christ Jesus, all are saved. If the point of the Law is to bring people to the point of salvation, then Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law since in Christ salvation is found.

## **Commentary on Luke 15:1-10** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

After his dinner with the lawyers and Pharisees (Luke 14:1-24), he tells all those who "have ears to hear" that following him is costly and requires a total commitment. The path he is walking leads to the cross. The cross, however, is not about death but about salvation. The cross is the shepherd staff that reaches out to grab the lost sheep. The cross is the light that helps the woman find her lost coin. For in the cross, the lost find forgiveness and hope. When someone dies, we say that we lost someone. Death seems like the ultimate loss a person can experience and yet on Easter morning new hope is found. For those who think they are not lost, the cross seems like a folly and a waste of life. For those who are lost, the cross and then the resurrection is the assurance that nothing that God loves is ever truly lost. The parables of the lost and the grumbling of the Pharisees and the scribes is simply the second part of what it means to be a disciple. We are called to leave everything behind in our "lost-ness" so that we can be found by the only One who matters.

## **Sermon Summary** (Youtube [Sermon Video](#))

The wonderful thing about parables is that they teach on so many different levels. In response to the grumbling of the Jewish leadership concerning Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus tells two parables in today's reading about things that are lost. From the very beginning of the parable, Jesus re-frames the entire congregation. It is no longer about being a sinner but rather it is about being lost. The parables say nothing about how the coin and the sheep came to be lost. The focus is not on assigning blame to the cause but instead the focus is on solving the current situation of being lost. Jesus is not eating with "sinners" but he is eating with all who are lost including the leaders.

Paul, who once was a young and powerful leader among the Jewish establishment, reflects that

his actions in light of Jesus were of the greatest degree of sin: " a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence." Paul does not blame the leadership or his inherent sinful nature which he examines in Romans 7 but rather Paul says that he "acted ignorantly in unbelief". Paul acted out of a state of being lost in his own self righteousness rather than being found in God's grace. The Jewish leaders at the table were also acting out of their belief that they were righteous. Paul, however, clearly understands that even being saved by Christ does not negate his inherent sin when he mentions sinners "of whom I am the foremost". Righteousness only belongs to Christ who covers our failures with his grace. If we think that we are righteous, then we are as lost as the leaders.

If the leaders are not the ones seeking the lost, then who are? Jesus uses the shepherd and the woman as examples of those who are looking. On the social scale, it is difficult to think of two groups of people who are more opposite than the Pharisees and the scribes compared to the shepherds and the single women. In the parable, it is almost as if Jesus is saying to the leadership, "If this people know enough to be looking for what is lost then why aren't you?" Maybe it is because they are lost in their own self righteousness but luckily Jesus doesn't mind eating with sinners who are lost. The question is are we the shepherds and the woman or are we the lost leaders?

The importance of this question was never more relevant than it was this Sunday when various suicides were lifted up in prayer. Being lost doesn't just mean that people are having a "rough" time but for some it is a matter of life and death. There are so many who have lost hope and look around to see only hate rather than love. Like Jeremiah, the vision of the world they see is filled with darkness and void. When we are lost, it is hard to see the light. Like an oppressive weight, the sense of desperation and hopelessness when a person is truly lost can make death appear as a relief. These are the people who need a reason to have faith. These are the children that need to know that they are loved. These are the elderly that need to know that there is still hope. If the Holy Spirit has gifted the Body of Christ with the gifts of faith, hope, and love, then why is our world so desperate for all three? Have we become so comfortable with the found that we can no longer hear the lost? This is not a political problem or an economic problem. This is our problem for we are the ones who God has given His grace to share. The question is will we?