

Scripture Readings and Sermon

August 25, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Jeremiah 1:4-10 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

When does life begin? This question has been at the center of the abortion debate for years. The debate, however, focuses strictly on the material and not the spiritual reality of our existence. In Jeremiah's call, the LORD says that "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you". That is to say, before you were material, you were a spiritual being fully known by God. God knows who you are and what you are capable of because God is the one who gives us all of our gifts and talents. These gifts and talents are given to the world through you. When we grow into who we were meant to be, the entire creation is greater because of it. It is not age or maturity that gives us these gifts but God which is why the Lord said, "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." When we use God's gifts for the glory of God, it is God who empowers those gifts to do the Lord's wonders. The power of God can build up or destroy. All we have to do is have faith in the gifts God has already given us and seek the Spirit's guidance on when and how to use them for God's glory.

Commentary on Hebrews 12:18-29 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

The writer of Hebrews refers to a story that every Jew would be well aware of - the Exodus story. After crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 14), the people journeyed for three months to the mountain of the LORD where Moses had seen the burning bush (Exodus 19). The Lord commanded them not to touch the mountain (Exodus 19:12). On the third day, there was "thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled." (Exodus 19:16) Unlike that story when the people were kept away, on the third day after the crucifixion Jesus rose and told the disciples to touch him and fear not (Luke 24:39). Our Exodus story is one where the Passover Lamb has freed us from the Pharaoh of sin. The Red Sea of Death has been permanently parted by Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection and we are journeying to the Promised land of heaven. This is what the writer of Hebrews is describing in 22-24. The captivity is over NOW! The sea is parted NOW! The Hebrew writer pleads for us not to refuse this freedom. The time will come when those without faith will be shaken and will fall. Let us by faith embrace the freedom Christ is offering. For a faith in Christ is unshakable.

Commentary on Luke 13:10-17 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

Numerology is said to be any belief in a spiritual significance associated with a number. Certain numbers in scripture are associated with spiritual meanings. Seven is symbolically associated with completion as found in the creation story and Jesus' response to often we should forgive. Three is viewed as the number of perfection as in the Trinity. Seven times three is 21 or complete perfection which is found in Revelations where as six three times (666) is perfectly incomplete. So what does this have to do with Luke? Luke is the only Gospel that uses the number 18 and only in Chapter 13. It is interesting to note that Luke writes "a daughter of Abraham whom Satan (666) bound for eighteen (6x3) long years". Eighteen also occurs one other place in scripture in relation to bondage, Judges 10:8 when the Ammonites oppressed the young nation of Israel 18 years during the time of the Judges. This oppression was finally broken when Jephthah led an army to defeat the Ammonites. Jephthah made a vow to God to kill the first thing that left his house when he arrived back home if he won the battle. Tragically, it was Jephthah's daughter whom he loved who greeted him. It was Jephthah's vow and not God's request that ended the daughter's life. It is interesting, therefore, that it is the synagogue leader who is condemning another "daughter of Abraham" to suffering after she had suffer 18 years of oppression.

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

While the focus of the Gospel text is a healing on the Sabbath, Luke places this healing in the context of a synagogue. In a patriarchal society, places of teaching such as the synagogue were primarily for the learned men and their students to reflect on theological subjects. Women and "God-fearers" (Gentiles), may be in the synagogue but were expected to keep their respectable distance. In the midst of this setting, Jesus called a woman who was afflicted to the middle of the synagogue. In other places in scripture, we are told that to be afflicted is an indication of God's displeasure. Surely, this woman should not be in the center of the synagogue. What I find the most amazing is not the healing on a Sabbath or the radical actions of Jesus but the woman's faith to respond to Jesus' call. Living in small towns, I understand how difficult it can be to go against the customs and expectations of a community and yet she stepped out in faith.

During the sermon, I recalled my own faith journey and the role John Wesley's story played in helping me step out in faith. By faith, we wait on the the Lord's grace and it is that same grace that calls us to respond. It is not a select grace of just a few nor is it an irresistible grace that demands a response. It is an amazing grace that reveals our own failures and then offers to heal those failures and restore our lives. It is a gentle offer which is freely given and can be freely received. One of the most wondrous things is even if we are not ready to make that leap of faith, God's grace in Jesus waits patiently for us to responds to his call. He is saddened only by the knowledge that the longer we wait, the longer we live in our own brokenness and pain. With the author of Hebrews, the entire scripture pleads with us not to refuse the one who is speaking but accept his offer of grace by faith.

When we have tasted that amazing grace, we find a blessed assurance of faith. For in Christ, our faith is not disappointed and can not be shaken. The more we lean into that faith, the more we grow in grace. That grace is the rock of our salvation and the foundation of our life in Christ. The more we step out in faith, the more faith we seem to have to respond to God's call. Like Jeremiah, we find that by have faith in God we can build up those who are hurting and tear down those things which do harm. By following God's call in faith, we find grace sufficient for all that we may face in life.