

Scripture Readings and Sermon

October 20, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Jeremiah 31:27-34 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

Chapters 30 and 31 of Jeremiah are often called "The Book of Consolation" for they stand out as a glimmer of hope in the middle of the Lord's messages of judgment. Like the calm before the storm, this section is a break between the warnings of what is about to happen and the story of the siege and fall of Jerusalem. After the message of hope in 30:1-31:26, Jeremiah proclaims three promises of the Lord (two of which are in this section). The first promise is that future generations will no longer have to pay for the sins of their ancestors. Each generation will be accountable for their sins but their children shall be declared innocent. The challenge for each generation is to learn from previous mistakes and stay true to Lord's calling on their life. In other words, just because your parents go to church does not make you a Christian. Each generation must accept Jesus as Lord for themselves. The second promise is related to the first. Since the sin has become individualized so has the Law. Righteousness will no longer be based on following tradition but will rather be based on following the covenant that God writes on the heart. Salvation has moved from a birth right to a personal relationship with the Lord. The final promise not included in this section is that the Lord will restore Jerusalem.

Commentary on 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

This section concludes Paul's advice to Timothy. The rest of the letter urges Timothy to visit and recommends people that Timothy should meet. The tone sounds very much like a man who knows they are going to die. In fact, the phrase "I solemnly urge you" in 4:1 was commonly used during Paul's day as part of the "last will and testament". These final words appear to hinge on verse 15. While verse 16 is more well known, the word translated as "scripture" in Greek simply means "writings" (graphe). It is in relationship with "sacred writings" (iera grammata) that these writings are identified as "scripture". The key word is "sacred" which is associated with religious worship. The "sacred writings" are the writings related to the worship of God. These are the "scriptures" that are "inspired by God" which is literally translated as God-breathed or God-spirited (Theo = God and pneuma = spirit). It is interesting to note that given this was likely the last letter of Paul around 65 A.D., the books of Jude, Gospel of John, letters of John and Revelation were probably not written. It is also doubtful that Paul was referring to his letters as scripture but rather as "sound doctrine" (4:3). The limitation of "sacred writings" to the Old Testament and possibly the early gospels is reinforced by the fact that Timothy knew them as a child. Jesus had died roughly 32 years earlier and Paul is realizing that the initial fervor for following Jesus is beginning to wane. For this reason, his last words to Timothy are to hold true to Paul's interpretation of how Jesus is the Messiah and the fulfillment of all the scripture and not to follow "itching ears".

Commentary on Luke 18:1-8 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

As Jesus moves toward "Palm Sunday" (19:28), Luke shifts the teachings toward the second coming of Jesus and judgment day. Jesus first teaches the "day of the Son of Man" will come suddenly just as the rains came for Noah or the destruction came to Sodom (17:20-37). Jesus then teaches the parable about prayer and the persistent widow. The parable ends with a return to the theme of the "Son of Man" and if faith will be found on that judgment day. Faith in this context is related to persistent prayer. Faith is made evident in the intensity and frequency of our prayer life. It is only when we have lost faith and feel that God is not listening, God does not care, or even God is not there that we stop talking to God. If our faith is strong, then why would we give God the "silent treatment" and not regularly talk to God in prayer? Has God become like the parent or grand-parent whom the children

forget about until the holidays? When the Son of Man come, will faith be found?

Sermon "Where is your faith?" (Youtube [Sermon Video](#))

A parable, that is prefaced by Jesus urging his listeners to not to give up praying, ends with Jesus asking if the Son of Man will find faith when he returns. Jesus links faith and prayer in a way that is often missed by individuals who have grown up in a church setting. Prayer is often introduced to children as a series of words to memorize like the Lord's Prayer or grace before meals. What often happens is when these children become adults they think that prayer must follow some formula or style like various types of poetry resulting in a reluctance to pray in public. Prayer, however, is not a formula but rather a heart felt expression of a life of faith. The closer our relationship with the Lord becomes, the easier and more open our prayer life becomes as well. Prayer is the daily and sometimes hourly discussion you have with the God you have come to have faith in. Prayer is the fruit of faith which is why Jesus links the two in the Gospel today.

But how do I grow in my faith life? For the answer to this question, we turn to Paul's letter to Timothy. Scripture is more than just "Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth (BIBLE)" but it is at its core the stories of our faith. Stories that show what happens when people step out in faith and stories about the difficulties that occur with their faith is lost. These are not abstract stories but family stories which is which names of people and places occur so often. They help us connect to the people who struggled with their faith as we often do and find that God is faithful even when we stumble and fall. These stories of faith inspire us to step out in faith. They help us grow our faith.

The stories of our faith in scripture have inspired people for generations. These stories have produced treasured music and numerous devotional material. As we read about other's stories of faith in publications like the Upper Room and sing the songs of our faith, the scriptures begin to sink deeply into our soul. During those times when it is difficult to pray, those same songs and scriptures rise from our depths to give us comfort and hope. This is what Jeremiah was referring to when he said that the commandments would be written on our hearts. As we daily walk with the Holy Spirit and live into the path that Jesus made for us, our faith relationship with God grows deeper and stronger. It is no longer about following a set of rules but it is about just a closer walk with Thee. In the quiet, we find God speaking to our hearts and encouraging our souls to faith, hope, and love. Prayer is the fruit of a tree of faith planted deeply in a loving relationship with God through Jesus Christ.