

Scripture Readings and Sermon

September 1, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Jeremiah 2:4-5, 7, 11-13 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

After Jeremiah is called by God and receives a vision of what is to come, he is sent to Jerusalem to proclaim God's judgment upon Judah. The setting is nearly one hundred years after the fall of Israel in 722 B.C. by Assyria. Judah was caught between Egypt and Assyria as a buffer zone. The death of the strong Assyrian ruler in 627 B.C. gave rise to a brief resurgence of Egypt over Judah. The region, however, was no match for the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire which quickly absorbed the old Assyrian Empire and beyond. Unlike with Assyria, Judah would not be spared from the wrath of Babylon because of their unfaithfulness. In verse 5, the text says that Judah followed after "worthless/empty/vain/vaporous things, and became worthless/empty/vain/vaporous themselves". These "things" have often been referred to as idols which can be linked to the defilement and abominations of the "no gods". Verse 13, however, expands "things" beyond simply false idols to anything that people put their faith in that is built or designed by humans. Worthless things could be a false sense of security because of the walls of Jerusalem or the grandeur of the Temple. Worthless things could also refer to a false sense of righteousness or "chosen" status. These are all "cracked cisterns" compared to a living relationship with God.

Commentary on Hebrews Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

Hebrews ends by addressing the question, "If Jesus replaces the entire Temple system, then what is expected of us?" The answer found in the Gospels is the commandment to love. Since Jesus has done everything needed to restore our relationship with God, we must now restore our relationship with one another based on Jesus' loving example. To love is to show hospitality to all, to remember those in prison and suffering, and to hold true to our earthly relationship especially in marriage. Marriage is so important because it is a physical reminder of our spiritual marriage to God. To love money is to commit spiritual adultery. We are to set before us examples of those who have shown the type of love Jesus showed on earth. The love of Jesus is eternal and so our love for Jesus should continually spring forth in our lives. In all of this, the author of Hebrews concludes, since we are free from self-righteousness because our righteousness is found in Jesus, we are free to love God and our neighbors with all our lives.

Commentary on Luke 14:1, 7-14 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

As Jesus was "journeying toward Jerusalem" (13:22), he stopped to have a meal at the house of a Pharisee. Once again he healed on the Sabbath as he did in the synagogue but when he asked them if it was lawful, they remained silent. Once again he compared healing to caring for a person's animal on the Sabbath (14:5). When they failed to respond to his comparison, he changed tactics and told them a parable. The parables was meant as a concrete example of the need for humility. All honor belongs to God, the host, and not to the presumed self-importance of the guests. When we are hosts to one another, we should be hosts to those in need and not those who have no need. For God cares more about those who are crying out in suffering than those who are bragging in their abundance. While these parables were meant to humble his audience so they would be more eager to "hear" rather than to "judge", their response totally missed the point. As an old proverb once stated, "it is hard to fill a cup that is already full". In their pride, the Pharisees and lawyers thought that they already knew everything that Jesus had to teach so they missed the wisdom that Jesus was offering.

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

In Jeremiah, the LORD says that the people of Judah, "went after worthless things, and

became worthless themselves" and the "nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods". In some translations, the "worthless things" and "no gods" they chased after were idols. What is an idol? Is it just a statue of a golden calf or can it be less concrete?

In Hebrews, we are warned to live "free from the love of money". Money is often portrayed as a false idol in the New Testament. Jesus tells the disciples that they can either love God or love money but not both. This would seem to indicate that money can be an idol if it is the object of our devotion. What other things or ideas are the objects of our devotion?

In Luke, the Pharisees had made prestige and social standing the object of their devotion. Even in the presence of the Son of God, they were more focused on where people were sitting than who was speaking to them. People have died in defense of a tradition or an institution. In today's society, it would appear that more people love their football team or the American flag more than God. Anything can become an idol if it receives more devotion than God. These are the empty cisterns that the LORD talks about in Jeremiah.

We often forget that our God is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5 - Ten Commandments). To place an object, a person, an institution, or an idea above our love for God is to commit adultery. This is why money is mentioned after the discussion about the marriage bed in Hebrews. When questioned, most of us would deny loving anything more than God but who do we spend the most time with? Do we know the people of the Bible as well as we do players on a team or actors and actresses? Do we spend as much time listening to God in prayer as we do "experts" on Fox or CNN? In other words, do we fill our day with the One who is worthy or on worthless things?

If we really love God, Hebrews tells us to love one another, show hospitality to the stranger, and pray for everyone in need. Jesus tells us to eat with "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind". If our society spent half as much time trying to help rather than critique, what kind of society would we live in? We have a choice: we can drink from the living water and share that life with others or we can focus on our leaking cisterns and complain about a broken world.