

Scripture Readings and Sermon

November 24, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Jeremiah 23:1-6 ([Youtube Lectionary Study Video](#))

After a lengthy judgment of the sons of Josiah, Jeremiah proclaims that the time of kings is over. The kings who were meant to be shepherds had almost destroyed God's flock. When the remnant is restored after the exile, God will establish a new "good" shepherd to oversee the flock. This is the promise of the "Branch of David" so often referred to during Advent. This promise actual occurs in both Jeremiah 23:5-6 and 33:14-16. While 23:5-6 is very similar to 33:14-16, the context is different. The section in chapter 33 takes place in the context of a "new covenant" and after Jeremiah has purchased land as a sign of restoration. It is most likely that in the final addition of Jeremiah, the promise in 23:5-6 was added. The reason for this speculation is that the section of the promise in 33 is not in the Septuagint which was the Greek version of the Old Testament commonly used during the time of the Gospels and often quoted directly in the New Testament. Another interesting note is that since 33 refers to Jerusalem which is feminine, the translation reads "it/she will be called: The Lord is our righteousness" rather than "he will be called". Chapter 33 may reference the second coming with the "new Jerusalem" referenced in Revelation.

Commentary on Philippians 4:4-9 ([Youtube Lectionary Study Video](#))

Jesus' resurrection and ascension for the early apostles meant the start of a new age. As promised in Joel, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the believers and the traditional way of view religion had changed. Since this new age would fully break forth when Jesus returned, the apostles rushed forth to spread the news before his return. Many of the early churches were formed with the expectation that Jesus' return was imminent. As the years passed, however, it became harder to maintain the original excitement and enthusiasm. People who came together because of faith now had to live with each other as this new "Body of Christ" or "Family of God". The letters to these new churches often included words of encouragement while Jesus' return was delayed. In this closing of Philippians, Paul encourages them to hold on to their original joy for "The Lord is near". After nearly 2000 years of waiting, the church is still called to renew that original excitement and enthusiasm as we remember Jesus' birth. It is during Christmas, the birth of Emmanuel, that we are remind that the Lord is *still* near.

Commentary on John 6:25-35 ([Youtube Lectionary Study Video](#))

In the story of the feeding of the five thousand, the people were following Jesus because of the signs and miracles. When Jesus tested the disciples about "feeding" the people, the disciples immediately thought of the physical rather than the spiritual and found two fish and five loaves. This act, shifted the focus away from signs and miracles and back to base needs. Jesus criticizes the people for following him based on the stomach rather than their souls and redirects the conversation back to a spiritual nature. The people, however, fail to see the feeding as a sign or miracle and thus fail to see Jesus as the One through whom they received this miracle. The people demand a more obvious sign like the miraculous appearance of manna from heaven before their very eyes. Astonished, Jesus points out that they already have this appearance for he is the bread of heaven. This shift from expecting God in the extraordinary, like bread raining from the sky, to seeing God in the ordinary, a man named Jesus, is too much for them.

Sermon "What Daily Bread Do You Eat?" ([Sermon Video](#))

Sometimes it can be a challenge to weave the scripture readings, the Christian calendar, and the secular calendar into one sermon. The Sunday before Advent is the last Sunday of the Christian year

often known as Christ the King Sunday. It is also often “Thanksgiving Sunday” in the United States. As relatives return home to celebrate this family holiday, there is an expectation that scriptures traditionally associate with thanksgiving will be read such as Psalm 100 and Philippians 4:4-9. The gospel lesson for Christ the King Sunday and Thanksgiving was a choice between Luke 23:33-43 (Jesus' crucifixion) or John 6:25-35 (Jesus' proclamation that he is the bread of life). So the question becomes, can these three things be woven together or should only one be chosen.

The theme of Christ the King and Thanksgiving are easily woven together because of the image of the great heavenly banquet after Christ's second coming. This banquet is frequently mentioned in Matthew and Revelation reflecting the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles in Christian eschatology. Just as Jesus fulfilled the Spring festivals of Passover and Shavout (Pentecost), the second coming of Jesus will fulfill the Fall festivals of Rosh Hashannah (Trumpets referred in Thessalonians), Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement referenced by Matthew's sheep and goats), and Sukkot (Tabernacles when the harvest is gathered and the banquet feast is held). Weaving this two themes together is easy but how do you weave in the gospel lesson?

Luke could be associated with the second coming of Jesus in relation to Jesus' statement to the thief that “Today you will be with me in Paradise” but how does that tie into the thanksgiving feast. John's imagery of bread is central to the thanksgiving motif but how does it tie into Christ the King. The key for weaving these together for this weeks sermon was found in the Lord's Prayer where we say, “Give us this day our daily bread”. If Jesus is the bread of life, the question is do we feed on this bread daily or do we choose poor substitutes.

Fitting for a culture that often prefers soda to water, it would make sense that this same culture would prefer to fast food to the staple of bread. What is this fast food – television and social media. We feed on the news of the day until it penetrates our daily existence. We gather in the coffee shops and around the water coolers (both physical and digital) to complain about the problems of the world or to choose a side in the current debate. Unfortunately, it is hard to be thankful when most of our day is spent in the toxic milieu of social media. In order to escape this toxic environment, our society escapes into virtual reality, comic book heroes, and hallmark sentimentality. All this fast food may fill our days but it diminishes our social and spiritual health. We need the King to return to our life. We need to remember the true source of our thanksgiving. We need our daily bread.

Just as God promises to gather the scattered flock and restore the people in the reading from Jeremiah, daily following Jesus binds us and unites us behind one leader and one simple truth. That truth is that it is only through faith, hope, and love that we can ever become who God created us to be. Faith in the God who is always with us – Immanuel. Hope that nothing including death can ever separate us from the goodness of God. And the eternal love the gave all at the cross and continues to give all through those who willingly follow. This is our daily bread. A bread that quenches our doubts and despairs. A bread that conquers hate with a love that rules for eternity. Christ is our King and that is reason enough to give thanks. When we give thanks for even the small things in our lives, like the five loaves that fed thousands, that small thanks will grow in our hearts and in our lives. Giving thanks feeds our faith, our hope, and our love. The only question is what will you feed on – Jesus or the world?