

LAY PREACHERS' BULLETIN – August 2025

*We are fortunate and blessed to have two sets of lectionary notes for August. The first set has been provided by The **Rev. Chris Nojonen**, Incumbent of St. George's, NE Calgary and the second set is provided by **The Rev. Dcn. Carol Tubman** - Holy Cross, Calgary, Secretary to the Archbishop and Secretary of Synod.*

August 3 - Pentecost 8

Propers - BAS page 371

OLD TESTAMENT: [Hosea 11:1-11](#)

PSALM [107:1-9, 43](#)

EPISTLE: [Colossians 3:1-11](#)

GOSPEL: [Luke 12:13-21](#)

SET 1

Rev. Chris Nojonen

EPISTLE

Background:

Colossians is one of several letters written by Paul to various churches in Asia. It is in what is modern day Turkey and the congregation of Paul's time would have largely been made up of Gentile Christians. As is true for most of Paul's letters, there was a combination of theology (in this letter largely an emphasis on Christology which would have been meant to counter the "angel cult" of Colossae) and practical instruction for Christian living. The emphasis on ethics would have been important for a group of people who were not already steeped in the ethics of Judaism. In my Bible this passage is, in fact, given the title "Rules for Holy Living".

Textual Notes:

The ethics set forth are not just arbitrary – but the natural expression of what life looks like when our lives are joined with Christ.

These ethics, many of which would have been found already in the Jewish tradition, are clearly meant for all whose lives have been made new in Christ.

The text makes clear that there is much in the old lifestyle that needs to be “put off” if we are to “put on” the new life in Christ.

Questions:

1. Practically speaking, what does it mean for me to set my heart on things above
2. How do I understand the idea of having a life “hidden” with Christ in God?
3. What are the implications of that?
4. Are some of these ethical concerns more challenging given our current cultural context?
5. Do I see my life as one of ongoing transformation – or, as the Benedictines put it, “ongoing conversion of life”?

GOSPEL

Background:

This parable, in my bible, is labelled “the parable of the rich fool”. Jesus often used parables as teaching tools. Like Aesop’s Fables, these are not historical narratives but stories meant to convey a moral point or life lesson. We often have a tendency to simply focus on the “punch line” of the parable. However, the early church father’s thought that every detail of the parable may be pointing to a deeper level of understanding. So, in any given parable, there may be more to glean than just the obvious point that the story is trying to make.

Textual Notes:

The context of the parable is a concern about right division of an inheritance. Jesus discerns that underneath the initial request there may be an underlying motivation of greed.

There is an abundance of provision in the man's good crop. His response is to plan for how he can make this abundant harvest his security blanket – and given this security he plans for a lazy and self-indulgent life.

The shock of the story is when the man is confronted with the uncertainty of life and the old maxim “you can't take it with you”.

Jesus points out that while he may have known how to manage his practical affairs, he had given no thought to the spiritual dynamics of his life.

Questions:

How does God intend for me to steward the abundance of his provision in my life?

How do I cultivate richness towards God in my daily affairs?

SET 2

Rev. Dcn. Carol Tubman

Overview:

This week's passages reflect how God, in His mercy, provides all that we need. We are to set our sights on higher things, instead of earthly things, and overcome our greed and reliance upon material objects.

Old Testament:

The prophet Hosea is predicting Israel will be overtaken by Assyria. Israel has been disobedient to God, as a wayward child who has grown into an ungrateful adult. But God, like a good father, still loves this child. He will not destroy Israel. The people will be allowed to return to their land. God pleads for them to repent and obey His commandments. Like a lion roaring to summon its young, God calls Israel to return to Him. This passage shows how divine compassion will overcome divine anger.

Psalm 107: 1-9, 43:

In this Song of the Redeemed, we hear of God's steadfast love enduring forever. Echoing the Hosea passage, there is deliverance through a father's care. There is compassion in His performing wonderful works, and His acts of satisfying all our needs.

New Testament:

Christians are urged to "seek the things that are above," not the things of this earth. Through our baptism, we begin a new life. We can start over. We set our minds on living as Christ has taught us, leaving behind our old nature of sin and putting on a new nature. In verse 5, the Apostle Paul lists the evil ways we are to "put to death." This term is strong language. We are urged to get rid of these harmful actions which are detrimental to others, including greed. Verse 6 warns of the wrath of God at the final judgement to those who are disobedient. In verse 10, we are told, "You are a new self." Now is the time for repentance, re-orienting one's life around Christ's exaltation and obedience to His authority.

Gospel:

Jesus, rather than answering a rabbinical question, teaches about the dangers of greed. He tells the parable of a rich man who stored up treasure on earth. When his life is taken suddenly, he is admonished by God for his foolish ways. True riches are found in living in right relationship with God.

In a round-about way, Jesus answers the question posed about sharing a family inheritance. There is a reproach to both parties, both the cheater and the cheated.

Questions:

1. What message is God sending to the Church today, in comparison to the view of Israel's "wrathful God"?
2. Many people think of God still as a God of Wrath. How can we who know otherwise spread the Good News to those who think this way?
3. Are we like the rich man in the parable?
4. Do we think our earthly possessions will save us?

5. How can we put away greed?

August 10 - Pentecost 9

Propers - BAS page 372

OLD TESTAMENT: [Isaiah 1: 1, 10-20](#)

PSALM: [50: 1-8, 23-24](#)

EPISTLE: [Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16](#)

GOSPEL: [Luke 12:32-40](#)

SET 1

Rev. Chris Nojonen

EPISTLE

Background:

The authorship of the book of Hebrews is unknown, but until the early 4th century was often attributed to Paul. It is believed to have been written to the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem and its essential purpose was to encourage these Christians to persevere in the face of persecution. A major theme is an emphasis on Jesus as the mediator between God and humanity and as the ultimate high priest who is also the sacrifice for us.

Textual Notes:

The focus is on Abraham as an example of faith in action. And his faith was rewarded with the son who many might have thought of as impossible.

Faith grounds us in a certainty that is not built on proof.

Faith looks for its fulfillment in a heavenly reality rather than earthly experience.

The focus of faith is not on our faith but on God's faithfulness.

When the New Testament speaks of faith, it is not just speaking of intellectual belief, but of trust and confidence.

Questions:

1. How is my faith encouraged by this narrative of the faith of Abraham?
2. How are faith and hope connected?
3. How do I understand faith to function in my life?

GOSPEL

Background:

This text comes shortly after the parable of the rich fool. That text was precipitated by the concern about right division of an estate. There was the warning against greed. The bridge text, which is not found in the lectionary this year, is the text in which Jesus tells us not to worry. And in today's text there is a two-fold direction. Concluding his response to the concerns about material possessions, Jesus tells us not to be afraid – there is a treasure that is secure. But it is in heaven. And, like the man in the earlier parable who was suddenly told that his life would be demanded of him, we are warned that we need to be watchful and ready for that day when the master returns.

Textual Notes:

Concern about provision leads to an anxiety that Jesus suggests is unnecessary given the faithfulness of God.

The previous parable spoke to being rich toward God. In this parable, there is again a focus on “treasure in heaven” and a connection between what we treasure and where our hearts are.

The lack of fear to which we are exhorted is based in the generosity of God's gift to us and then frees us to be fearlessly generous stewards of God's good gifts.

The unpredictability of the master's return calls for a constant attitude of readiness.

Unlike the rich fool who wanted to “eat, drink, and be merry”, we are to understand ourselves as having been called to a life of service in the kingdom of God.

Questions:

1. How do I understand the kingdom of God? (note – Dallas Willard, one of my favourite teachers, understood the kingdom to be not just a future heavenly realm, but a present reality where God’s effective will is actively done)
2. What are the fears that sometimes inhibit my full embrace of kingdom living?
3. Are there ways in which I can order my life in order to live in an attitude of readiness?
4. How does this text speak to me in terms of the stewardship of both my time and possessions?

SET 2

Rev. Dcn. Carol Tubman

Overview:

God has good things in store for those who follow Him in obedience, trust and faith.

Old Testament:

The name Isaiah means, “Yahweh is salvation.”

We find a stern warning in the prophet Isaiah’s vision. God reveals a comparison of this generation to Sodom and Gomorrah, evil cities which were destroyed by God. God is telling the people of Israel, “I don’t heed your sacrifices done in vain. I reject your offerings. I do not need your empty piety or insincere worship. You are not

coming to worship me with a pure heart.” True worship comes from the heart, not from the act. These people have abused God’s ordinances and must repent.

Isaiah counsels the people to cease to do evil by seeking to do good through righteous justice, rescuing the oppressed, and defending the defenceless. Doing these moral actions will cleanse them of their sins. One must become obedient and not be stubborn. In doing so, they will be blessed, and God will provide all their needs. But by not turning away from evil ways, there will be punishment and death. Judah has to make a choice: a prosperous land or Assyria’s sword.

Psalm 50: 1-8, 23 & 24

The psalmist describes God as being almighty, in control, causing the sun to rise and set. Like the sun, God shines forth out of Israel with the light of truth. He is a devouring fire and a fierce wind, which was how He appeared at Mount Sinai. He summons His faithful children to himself, and He shall judge them. Here again, God accuses them of negligence in their sacrifices but encourages repentance. Those who offer gratitude and obedience honour God, and those who live in justice and peace will receive salvation.

New Testament:

This passage begins with the definition of Faith. This is the only place in the Bible where Faith is defined. By Faith, our ancestors received approval. It is such people with whom God is willing to associate with and be known as their God. The Word of God (Jesus is the Word) prepared the world. This earth was made from invisible things. This passage describes how Abraham, a hero of God’s people, did deeds through his strong faith. He trusted in the divine call, not knowing where he was being led, but was simply obedient. Miracles occurred because of his unwavering faith. He lived out a conviction of the unseen.

Those who live by faith look forward to a “homeland,” a “better country,” a heavenly home prepared by God, even though it is unseen. God as deliverer is the unseen object of hope. That these unseen things are realities is proof

or evidence of their existence. Faith is knowledge, helping us to understand the beginning of the universe and the foundations of our human history. We believe even though we have not seen.

Gospel:

Jesus assures His followers that the Father is willing to give them the Kingdom. To see God's Kingdom is to set one's aim in life on God himself and work to further His rule with all its blessings. His followers (and us, as well) can trust that God will provide for all our needs. Jesus teaches two parables: the Gatekeeper and the Servant Entrusted with Supervision. We are called to rely on God solely, and not allow worldly possessions to take the place of our focus. The Master here is willing to wait upon his servant, just as Jesus was willing to serve mere mortals. Matthew 20:28 states: He came not to be served but to serve. Faithful followers are encouraged to be ready for Christ's return at an unknown and unexpected hour. While we wait, we must be engaged in the Lord's service.

Questions:

1. Ask yourself: "Is my worship coming from my heart, or from my actions?"
2. Are we truly able to put our assurance in things hoped for, or being convinced of things not seen? Are there some aspects of our faith where some doubt lingers?
3. As we await Christ's return, we are called to engage in the Lord's service. In what ways are we doing this? Going back to Question 1, is this service coming from our hearts or from other purposes (pride, recognition, achievement, other)?

August 17 - Pentecost 10

Propers - BAS page 374

OLD TESTAMENT: [Isaiah 5:1-8](#)

PSALM: [30:1-2, 8-18](#)

EPISTLE: [Hebrews 11:29 - 12:2](#)

GOSPEL: [Luke 12:49-56](#)

SET 1

Rev. Chris Nojonen

EPISTLE

Background:

The authorship of the book of Hebrews is unknown, but until the early 4th century was often attributed to Paul. It is believed to have been written to the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem and its essential purpose was to encourage these Christians to persevere in the face of persecution. A major theme is an emphasis on Jesus as the mediator between God and humanity and as the ultimate high priest who is also the sacrifice for us.

Textual Notes:

This text begins with a focus on actions that people took because of faith – walking through the Red Sea, marching around Jericho, Rahab welcoming the spies.

There is also reference to faith in the face of persecution. These examples would have been known to the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem and would have been clearly understood as examples for them to follow in the face of their own experience of persecution.

These examples would have also shown that faith cannot expect rescue (or a good outcome) in this life – but encourages a long-term view – the ultimate “something better” prepared by God for us.

The heavens are cheering us on as we are encouraged to persevere.

Jesus is the ultimate example of faith – faithful perseverance. And he is the one who has called us to this race and will enable us to finish it well.

Questions:

1. Is persecution a part of my present reality?
2. How does this text help me to live in the face of difficult situations?
3. If the Christian life is like running a race, what are the things that interfere with my ability to run it well – as how do I throw them off?
4. Are there particular spiritual disciplines that help me to fix my eyes on Jesus?

GOSPEL

Background:

This gospel text has two sections and it may be worth noting that the first section (verses 49-53) is addressed to the disciples while the second section (verses 54-56) is addressed to the crowd following Jesus. Both sections would have felt provocative to the respective audiences – and probably feel equally disconcerting to us today.

We are used to thinking of Jesus as the Prince of Peace, so these notes of division sound quite jarring. In the second part of the text the crowd is chastised for knowing how to interpret the weather but lacking in spiritual discernment about the times they live in.

Textual Notes:

We find the image of fire often in the scriptures. But is it a good fire like the pillar of fire that led the Israelites through the wilderness? Is it the kind of purifying fire we read of in Malachi? Or is it a fire of destruction and judgement of all things evil?

Jesus refers to a future baptism and that is a reference to his death – literally a baptism of blood. Early Christians martyrs, if they hadn't yet been baptized before their martyrdom were deemed to have been received a baptism of blood.

Jesus speaks of division. I think we must read this not as Jesus' intent – but as the inevitable consequence of relationships where one is committed to Christ and another is not. Especially in early Christian families (where there were no “cradle Christians”) we can see how this could happen. And still happens in cultures that are hostile to Christianity.

Discernment is a key theme in the second part of the text. Earlier in the chapter Jesus had spoken of the Father having given the kingdom to those who follow Jesus. “This present time” may be a reference to the kingdom reality that Jesus was ushering in, to which many remained oblivious.

Questions:

1. How do we understand the purpose of the fire Jesus says that he has come to bring?
2. In the face of conflict and division, how do we arrive at a true peace that is not compromise of the gospel message?
3. Or do we settle for a peace that is not really peace?
4. How do we discern the Missio Dei (the mission or work of God) in our present day?

SET 2

Rev. Dcn. Carol Tubman

Overview:

God cared for his people in bringing them out of slavery into a new land. But, like sour grapes, they turned against him. In His compassion for them, God continued to provide for them, in sending Jesus, to uproot and restore the people into a right relationship with God.

Old Testament:

In this allegory, the passage begins as a love song; God is singing to His beloved, His people. All that God provided to Israel is represented as a vineyard.

But then the tone changes. The grapes, described as wild, have turned rotten. There is judgement by the vineyard owner and his wayward vineyard. What else could the owner do? What could God do for His people?

The end of the passage describes punishment. God will allow the Assyrians to overtake Israel through its “broken walls.”

There are Hebrew puns:

justice = “mishpat”; bloodshed = “mispah”; righteousness = “tsedaqah”; cry = “tse aqah.”

Did the vineyard owner find righteousness? No, only corruption. Did he find decency? No, only despair.

Psalm 80: 1-2, 8-18

The Northern Kingdom issues a community petition, “A cry to come to save us.”

The vineyard allegory is used here again. The founding of Israel is compared to a transplanted vineyard from Egypt into Canaan. The vines flourished during the empires of David and Solomon through God’s intervention. Now the walls have been broken.

The gardener has abandoned it. The Gentiles have overrun it, like “wild beasts.”

The writer questions why God is allowing this destruction by their enemies. There is a cry of penitence and need.

New Testament:

The author continues to show how it was by faith that the mighty works of the Lord were accomplished through Israel’s leaders.

This time, there are references to:

- Israel’s being led out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea on dry land, witnessing God’s hand in the impossible feat of parting the waters and defeating their enemies. This occurred because of their dependence and faith in God.

- The walls of Jericho fell by Israel who followed God's instructions. There is obedience and endurance in their faith with confidence in the unseen.
- Rahab the prostitute acted in faith. She, too, recognized the unseen power of God.
- A summary of other heroes such as Gideon, Barak, Samson, and other leaders as well as ordinary people, including the apostles who acted in faith and obedience.

The supreme achievement of faith is victory over death in the resurrection. These souls of past followers of God act as witnesses and encouragers to inspire our Christian walk. We look to them and to Jesus to be able to persevere in our daily challenges and to run our race. Jesus is the ultimate model of faith in God and is an example for us to follow.

Gospel:

Luke states that Jesus is desirous of the fire of the message of a life in following Him be ignited. The message is spread through the power of the Holy Spirit. People must decide whether or not to confess Him as their Lord. His anticipated death will instigate repentance and beginning life anew in true pathways. His being under "stress" is His longing for His suffering to be accomplished.

There will be discontent as people change their ways to Christ's ministry; it will cause conflict and division, even within households. Like weather patterns, the signs of crisis are already apparent, but people are neglecting to recognize them.

Questions:

1. The heroes of the Old Testament who acted in faith inspire us today. Are there other heroes not mention on this list that inspire you?
2. Are there any modern day heroes whose lives of faith have inspired you?
3. Luke's passage describes how Christ's ministry has caused people to encounter conflict and division. Is this experienced today?
4. How can our faith in Jesus guide us through these difficult times?

August 24 - Pentecost 11

Propers - BAS page 375

OLD TESTAMENT: [Jeremiah 1: 4-10](#)

PSALM: [71: 1-6](#)

EPISTLE: [Hebrews 12: 18-29](#)

GOSPEL: [Luke 13: 10-17](#)

SET 1

Rev. Chris Nojonen

EPISTLE

Background:

In this passage a contrast is drawn between Mount Sinai (where Moses received the law) and a Mount Zion (which is not the earthly Jerusalem in which these people lived but a reference to the heavenly Jerusalem which was to come). It is thought that this book may have been written to Jews in Jerusalem who were tempted to revert back to Judaism (which was recognized as a legitimate religion in Roman culture) in the face of persecution for their newly acquired Christian faith (which did not become legal until 313 AD). The question that is being asked is “which covenant are you going to adhere to”?

Textual Notes:

The mountain of the old covenant is presented as a terrifying place that cannot be touched (on pain of death). On the other hand, these Christians are welcomed into the home of the new covenant, the heavenly Jerusalem (filled with a rejoicing assembly). This would have been seen as a reassurance in the event that their faith led to martyrdom.

The blood of Abel was seen as representing a cry for vengeance and justice while the sprinkled blood of Jesus was the means of atonement and reconciliation.

God promises a “shaking” which is ultimately a sifting out of all that is evil before the new temple and the new Jerusalem will be ushered in. The kingdom received by Christians will not be shaken because God, who is a consuming fire, has already purified it by the blood of Christ.

In the face of what God has done and is doing, our response is awe and reverent worship.

Questions:

1. How does this text speak to us if/when we are tempted to ignore what God says, or, in fact, turn away from God?
2. How do we live the life of the new covenant bestowed to us in Baptism?
3. Are there things that need to be shaken out of my life?

GOSPEL

Background:

In the gospels, healing is a core part of Jesus ministry. It is a physical demonstration of God’s intent to restore people to wholeness and a demonstration of Jesus’ authority and power. While we tend to focus on the physical aspect of healing, many healing stories also make clear that an emotional, spiritual and social healing are sometimes also the result. Healing was a sign of the Kingdom of God that was breaking in through the presence and ministry of Jesus. Healing is also a ministry that Jesus entrusted to his disciples. While we tend to rely on doctors and the health care system, we acknowledge that ultimately all healing comes from God. Many congregations have prayer ministries (with laying on of hands) as a way of expressing that healing continues to be the desire of Jesus.

Textual Notes:

Today’s text really has two parts. One is the actual healing miracle, but the other focuses on the dynamics of this healing having happened on the Sabbath, in a synagogue.

The woman had been crippled for 18 years and had probably come to terms with her disability and had no hope that things would ever be different. In this story, she does not approach Jesus. Rather Jesus sees her need and initiates the encounter. The encounter includes Jesus' words and the act of laying hands upon her.

Interesting that the wrath of the synagogue ruler is not expressed directly against Jesus – but becomes an exhortation to the crowd that they shouldn't seek healing on the Sabbath (since healing was considered a form of prohibited work).

Jesus takes the opportunity to redefine the whole range of what is permitted on the sabbath – not just necessary acts, but merciful acts. (see Mark 2: 27 – the sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the sabbath)

Questions:

1. How do we integrate Jesus' ongoing ministry of healing into our lives, personally and as a congregation?
2. Do we have Sabbath practices that reflect Jesus' intent for the Sabbath?

SET 2

Rev. Dcn. Carol Tubman

Overview:

God, from before we are born, knows us and has plans for us. He is always with us. He is approachable, through the intercession of His son, Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit. He is full of mercy and compassion.

Old Testament:

We read of a conversation between the Lord and the prophet Jeremiah, as he is called to ministry to the nations. The Lord lets Jeremiah know He has

predestined him to this appointment as prophet before his birth. The Lord formed Jeremiah as a potter forms clay. Jeremiah hesitates. He makes excuses (as have others whom God has called).

However, the Lord will give this chosen one the ability and the words. There is the promise, "For I am with you." This is a message of hope and confidence. God also gives Jeremiah a sign, by touching his mouth. Jeremiah is called to judge and restore, acts that are both destructive and constructive. The appointed authority rests not in the messenger but in the divine commission of God's word and His presence.

Psalm 71: 1-6

"I take refuge" - we can run to our Lord for protection and strength. Again, this is a message to us that God is always with us (as He was with Jeremiah). God always safeguards us.

"From my youth" - like Jeremiah, God is always with us, even from our birth. God is described as deliverer, rescuer, saviour, a rock and fortress, our hope and our trust.

New Testament:

The Israelites experienced God at Mount Sinai as a terrifying presence in the forms of fire, darkness and gloom (or a cloud), a strong wind or a loud noise. Even animals were forbidden to touch the mountain where God dwelled or they would die. Moses himself was overwhelmed with fear.

But we have a different experience. We can approach God, through Jesus, our mediator. Mount Zion in Jerusalem is named as a contrast to the Israelite's Mount Sinai. We are encouraged to not refuse this offer of salvation through a new covenant in Jesus. We have the hope of an eternal Kingdom. And we, in turn, are asked to offer our thanks and praise with "reverence and awe." We are to respond to the one speaking to us, similar to God's call to Jeremiah. Though the earth may pass away, His words will abide. We are to be grateful by serving God in ways which please Him.

Gospel:

This passage describes Jesus healing a crippled woman. He set her free from her ailment and touched her, making her whole. The leader of the synagogue was indignant at the breaking of the law, in this case, healing (working) on the Sabbath. As the disability was not life-threatening, the healing, in the leader's mind, could have waited until later in the week. But Jesus calls the religious leaders hypocrites. He explains about mercy. The woman's physical ailment is seen as the work of Satan.

Such afflictions conflict with God's salvation.

Questions:

1. As God calls each of us to our individual ministries, what excuses might we come up with?
2. Our God is approachable. But what areas of our lives might we withhold from Him?
3. With today's view of modern medicine, do we ever see an ailment as not being worthy of bringing to Jesus through healing ministry or prayer?
4. Do we see ailments as the work of Satan?
5. Do we discredit Jesus' ability to free us from our issues, physical or otherwise?

August 31 - Pentecost 12

Propers - BAS page 377

OLD TESTAMENT: [Jeremiah 2:4-13](#)

PSALM: [81: 1, 10-16](#)

EPISTLE: [Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16](#)

GOSPEL: [Luke 14:1, 7-14](#)

SET 1

Rev. Chris Nojonen

EPISTLE

Background:

Having made his case for perseverance in the face of persecution, the author of Hebrews concludes with some basic instruction for life within the Christian community. Love is the basis for the loving actions that are listed in verses 2 to 5. This is really one of those texts where a single verse could become the basis for a whole sermon. God is the source of stability and hope in our lives and Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today and forever, is held up as a kind of model of constancy despite the everchanging world around us. Again there is the allusion to his role as high priest, through whom we can offer sacrifices – this time of praise, not slaughtered animals.

Textual Notes:

While the text addresses the Christian community as a whole, there is a special emphasis on care and solidarity with the marginalized – strangers and prisoners.

Sexual purity within marriage was seen as contributing to the stability of the community and was somewhat countercultural. In both Greek and Roman culture there was a strong double standard with women expected to keep pure and men given more license as long as they didn't commit adultery (which was not defined as being untrue to their spouse but rather as engaging in sexual relations with someone else's wife).

Trust in God went hand in hand with an attitude of contentment rather than greed with respect to possessions.

Sacrifice is understood not just as ritual, but as concrete actions – doing good and sharing.

Questions:

How are we called to care for the marginalized in our culture?

Does this text challenge me to any changes of action or attitude?

Have I integrated “sacrifice” into my Christian practice in any meaningful way?

GOSPEL

Background:

Jesus was always under observation. We can assume that the Pharisee was concerned about whether or not Jesus was keeping the law as strictly as he should. But Jesus was also watching the room and observing the social interactions around that table. He took the opportunity to talk both about how to be a proper guest and how to be a proper host. All of this was a preface to a reflection on the feast which was to come in the kingdom of God. Again, while people were anxious to scrutinize Jesus, he turned the tables so they ended up reflecting on themselves.

Textual Notes:

The Pharisees considered themselves the ultimate religious folk of their day. One can read this whole text as Jesus’ teaching on what truly spiritual behaviour looks like.

The first part of the text reflects on the desire that people have for position and status and the actions that are sometimes taken to try to assert our status. Actions which may backfire on us.

The image of “wedding feast” clearly points us to the kingdom feast that is to come.

Jesus advocates for a posture of humility instead of self-aggrandizement. While Jesus gives a practice reasons for this (so that we don't face the humiliation of literally being put in our place), we can also reflect on the humility as a preferred Christian value.

Jesus gives a rather countercultural perspective on hospitality. Instead of the prevalent reciprocity of social invitations, Jesus suggest spiritual blessing is found in a radical hospitality towards those who don't have the capacity to pay us back.

Jesus suggests that ultimately we receive recompense at the hand of God, implying the superiority of that to an attitude of keeping the accounts balanced in our social relationships.

The reference to the "resurrection of the righteous" serves as a reminder to do everything in light of heavenly realities, not just earthly circumstances.

Questions:

Is humility even considered a desirable virtue these days? What does a healthy humility look like?

What kind of opportunities do I have to practice the kind of radical hospitality that Jesus encourages in this text?

SET 2

Rev. Dcn. Carol Tubman

Overview:

Our God who loves His people, who leads and provides for them, desperately desires us to live in obedience and submission. In the passage from Hebrews, we receive a list of practical instructions for living in holiness. We are to act humbly and generously, and in turn, we will be blessed.

Old Testament:

God is asking why His people of Israel have turned away from Him and broken faith. Why are they now worshipping idols? Why have they forgotten their covenant and His deeds which rescued them from slavery in Egypt? Why have they forgotten His leading them to the Promised Land? Why are they refusing to allow God to provide all their needs?

The priests who were in charge of the Law had forgotten God's instructions. The prophets were speaking from the voice of false gods. God accuses His people of turning to worthless idols. He appeals to the heavens to witness this abandonment. These people cannot recall their history and refuse to lament, indicating a loss of relationship with their God. Instead of a gushing stream of living water, they opt for cracked, polluted wells.

Psalm 81: 1, 10-16

This psalm offers praise to God, who is mighty in His strength. He brought the people out of Egypt and provides all that they need. Here again, the people are not listening to God's voice and are not willing to follow Him. They reject their God when He has been especially kind, patient and attentive to their needs. He wants to bless Israel, but awaits their obedience.

New Testament:

This passage states practical instructions to the community:

- Love one another.
- Welcome the stranger.
- Remember the captive and the tortured. We are to share one another's trials.
- Honour marriage and live chaste lives without defilement.
- Do not worship wealth and be content with what God has already given us.
- Know that our God will never leave us nor forsake us. He promises us His personal help. The Lord is our Helper and Defender.

- Honour those in leadership, teachers, and those who set an example with their good lives.
- Depend on Jesus' unchanging ways.
- Let us continually praise Him.
- Do good and be willing to share.

These things please God.

Gospel:

Jesus is going to the house of a Pharisee leader to eat (on the Sabbath). There is an opportunity to teach. This illustrates the inclusive nature of Jesus' ministry.

The guests at this meal are jockeying for position at the table. Jesus teaches first a parable of instruction: do not sit at the place of honour, in case you face the humiliation of being asked to move to a lower seat. By taking a seat at the lowest place at the table, one may receive honour. This calls for an attitude of true modesty, and God exalts the humble. "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

In the second parable, Jesus' teaching deals with who one invites to a banquet. Do not invite only those people who will repay you. That is a tangible, earthly reward.

Instead, reach out to those who cannot repay you. This will bring blessing, and you will be repaid at the final judgement. All should seek to do good to those who cannot give anything in return.

It is important to remember to do all our actions, including where we sit or who we invite, with sincerity and love. We are not to act out of false piety or the hope of a reward in the future.

These teachings are backed up in other Gospels, in Matthew 23:12 and Mark 9:35.

Questions:

1. What idols or gods are pulling people away from the church today?

2. From the instructions for living found in Hebrews 13, are we following these in our lives?
3. Which might be the most difficult when we examine our hearts and actions?
4. Jesus teaches us to act humbly and generously. Is this something we keep in mind as we interact with family and friends?