

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost/September 1, 2019
Jeremiah 2:4-13; Psalm 81:1, 10-16; Luke 14:1, 7-14;
Rev. Joel M. Krueger

"Lessons on Humility"

The words spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, which we heard today, of God's judgment upon the people of Israel, could very easily be transferred to our day and time and to our people. The prophet speaks what God is proclaiming to their nation, this people who seem to have forgotten their history, forgotten how they got to where they are, forgotten that they were once a people enslaved in Egypt and brought out by the hand of God.

Their lapse in memory, however, isn't simply forgetfulness. The prophet points to an undercurrent that has overtaken their hearts and turned them away from their God. That undercurrent is a belief that they have been the creators of their own well being, responsible for their own wealth and good fortune.

God says, *"I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination."* It is unfortunately much too easy to think of the multitude of ways we have done that very same thing:

The stealing of lands from those who first lived here, the outright slaughter and forced removal of so many away from their homes to be relegated to reservations.

The enslavement of peoples of color, not temporary as a debt slavery but a permanent slavery that would keep generations enslaved and treated like chattel. Human beings held as property by other human beings! What greater transgression could a nation make?

The continuation of that "slavery" even after the Emancipation Proclamation that was supposed to end slavery, in the form of Jim Crow laws in the south and "redlining" in the north. Of the lack of rights, of intimidation, of beatings, of lynching's, of creating a whole culture of fear for any who did not fit into the predominant and dominating race. The destruction of our lands and waters, how we have cut down the forests that once covered this nation, how only a small percentage of the ancient redwoods and other old growth forests still stand. How we have polluted our lakes and streams with the burning of fossil fuels so that there is so much mercury and acid in our lakes, that the fish are too poisonous to eat. How we are finding plastics in our oceans and throughout the ecosystem, human-made elements that are destroying the very integrity of nature itself! The development of weapons meant for nothing but killing and the availability of such things for personal use, as if killing were a form of entertainment. And indeed the entertainment and gaming industries that makes of war and killing a fun activity. Of the creation of weapons of mass destruction and the pouring of immense amounts of money into the defense industry which itself is the largest polluter of our oceans and environments besides the capacity to destroy the entire planet a number of times over.

This is what we have done with the bounty and the blessings of this land and the people with whom we live. Of course, it is not just our nation. But every nation has in its own way, **"defiled"** what God has given and **"made God's heritage an abomination."** So much of Western Civilization itself has made the earth and all that is within it, something to be owned, something to be used, something to take from and then be discarded. We have lost any sense of

the sacred in our midst. And so much of it stems from an **arrogance** we possess. An attitude that we are "self-made." And that we can act however we wish, in whatever way we want, unaccountable to anyone, not responsible for anything.

Jeremiah's God said it this way: *"for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water."* (Jer. 2:13). We too, have sought to make ourselves gods, have made for ourselves cisterns, cracked cisterns, that cannot hold water. And we are paying the price.

We don't have to be this way. Not all cultures have treated the earth this way. Many indigenous peoples have a great sense of care and respect for the sacred earth and treat it like their mother. We have much to learn from them. But mostly it is an **attitude**. An understanding that we are not the center of the universe. That we are but one small part of this amazing, complex and wonderful creation, **made by God**, and not by us.

At the end of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, the Lord's Prayer, there is a line that is not found in either the Matthean or Lukan version of that prayer, both of those end with *"And lead us not into temptation."*(Luke) *"But deliver us from evil."* (Matt.)

That final line, *"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen."* is found only in some of the ancient manuscripts. Scholars say it is most likely inspired by the words of King David in I Chronicles 29:11-13, where he says, *"Blessed art thou, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all."*

With that last line in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus is reminding his disciples of the attitude they are to have before God. **An attitude of humility**. In this, Jesus follows in a long tradition of such teaching. We heard it from King David. We hear it throughout the book of Proverbs: *"When pride comes, then comes disgrace; but with the humble is wisdom."*(11:2); *"Every haughty person is an abomination to the Lord"*(16:5); *"Better to be humble among the afflicted than to share spoils with the proud"*(16:19); *"Pride goes before ruin; arrogance before failure"* (16:18). And of course we hear it in the words of the prophet Micah which we've included in our own Welcoming Statement: *"And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."*(Micah 6:8).

In our gospel reading from Luke, Jesus is once again at someone's home for a meal. More than any of the other gospels, Luke has Jesus eating - my kind of guy! Jesus gathers around the table to eat with the outcasts and marginalized. Around the table and food, he teaches and instructs. Around the table, he gathers with those, like these Pharisees, his adversaries, those with whom he may have disagreements and may seek to reprove, but with whom he acknowledges a kinship, a relationship, an equality. It is here he teaches them, *"For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

We humans, are capable of great arrogance. And that arrogance has led to great cruelty, to unspeakable devastation, and the potential for annihilating life on Earth. We need to remember that we cannot take the place of God, the source of "Living Water". That we cannot misuse and abuse this one planet that we have been given. That all in the universe is not for our

taking and that we are but one small piece of God's creation. We must seek an attitude of humility, before God and this planet which is our home.

Jesus himself, exemplified humility. He placed himself above no one. He saw himself at one with the poor, the sick, the lonely, the hungry. He met with those who loved him and laughed with him and taught those who would follow him. But he also sought out the rich and powerful, that he might teach them and show them the way. That they might change their hearts. He welcomed all to gather around the table, to humble themselves and be united in God's love.

And so today, as we gather around this table, let us remember that **it is not our table**. It is not the Church's table. **It is Christ's table**, and all, every one of us, no matter who we are, are welcome, are invited, are called, **to humble ourselves** before God and one another, and join together as one, as we **remember** who we are, the children of God, the *fountain of living water*. Amen.