

Bible Study
Proper 17, Year C
August 28, 2016

[RCL] **Jeremiah 2:4-13; Psalm 81:1, 10-16; Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14:1, 7-14**

Jeremiah 2:4-13

In this passage of contrasts, God's people are confronted with the senselessness of turning away from their God. Prophets falsely prophesy for no profit. The people, whom God has blessed over and over, chase after gods who are not even gods. Pursuing worthless things made the people themselves worthless. And the one true God, who is described as the fountain of living water, is abandoned and the people try to collect life-water in containers with cracks.

It is our tendency as humans to try to satisfy our deepest desires with cheap substitutes. By looking at our sins we will have clues as to what we really need. The people dug cracked cisterns indicating they knew they needed water. How might our misguided attempts to fill our deepest longings be a way to find our true heart's desire in God?

The prophet brings a strong indictment against the leaders. As leaders of God's people we have a responsibility to ask, "Where is the Lord?" It is our job to interpret life's situations in light of God's reality and lead people to see how God is there for them. Only then will we be able to offer the water that truly satisfies.

- Where do you see the Lord in your present situation?
- What worthless things are you chasing after that diminish your own worth?
- How might your sin be the very thing that can lead you to the fountain of living water?

Psalm 81:1, 10-16

In Psalm 81 a connection is made between hearing and obeying. The people do not obey because they don't listen to God's voice. Our English words *obey* and *listen* both share the same Latin root *audire*.

The psalmist suggests praise and remembering as ways to hear God. As we sing songs declaring who God is, and tell stories about all God has done, we will be open to hearing God's voice. We will also desire to do God's will, knowing God only wants the best for us.

God's desire is to fill God's people with good things. As we choose not to listen to God we are given over to the consequences of going it alone. As we turn back to God, our needs are met.

- What are some ways you have seen God show up on your behalf in the past?
- What practices help you listen to God's voice?
- What good things are you missing from God because you have forgotten God's goodness?

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Hebrews 13 tells us how to give thanks for "a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (Hebrews 12:28). By showing care for those in our communities of faith, as well as those who are strangers, we live out our gratitude for our place in God's kingdom.

We are invited to use our imaginations to place ourselves with prisoners and those who are tortured. Rather than locking them away and forgetting about them, we are urged to enter their pain as if our own bodies were suffering with them. In God's kingdom no one is outside of God's concern.

We are also called to show our gratitude in how we deal with sex and money. In our temptation to meet these needs outside of God's provision, we are reminded that God sees us and that God is with us. As we seek to care more about others and less about money we are reminded that God is always caring for us. God invites us to trust as we participate in this kingdom work.

- What would it look like for you to care for strangers and those suffering in prison?
- In what ways is your care for money and sex inhibiting your participation in God's kingdom?

Luke 14:1, 7-14

Luke uses a familiar wedding banquet metaphor to show us what honor looks like in God's kingdom.

Jesus notices that the guests at the dinner assume their own privilege in choosing their place at the table. He invites them to let go of whatever it is that they feel makes them better than the others. His message is for those of us who feel we have a choice as to where we belong in the world. As we release our need to play the comparison game, and then identify with the lowly, we will be honored by God.

Jesus perfectly displayed this path of letting go of privilege in becoming human so that God could lift him up to the highest place (Philippians 2). Through this parable Jesus is inviting us to join him in this same journey of going down and being lifted up.

In the second half of this parable Jesus teaches what it looks like to use privilege to lift up others. Like God we are invited to do the same work in lifting up the humble. So in this great cycle of humility and being lifted up we participate with God in the lifting up of others.

- What privileged position are you being invited to let go of?
- How can you use the place God has given you to lift up those whom life has brought low?

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