

Sunday, September 19, 2021
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
Reflections by Juel Pierce

First Reading

Jeremiah 11:18-20

Today's reading tells of the suffering of the prophet Jeremiah, who announced God's word to Judah but was met with intense opposition and persecution. Jeremiah continues to trust in God in the midst of his suffering.

¹⁸It was the LORD who made it known to me, and I knew;
then you showed me their evil deeds.

¹⁹But I was like a gentle lamb
led to the slaughter.

And I did not know it was against me
that they devised schemes, saying,
"Let us destroy the tree with its fruit,
let us cut him off from the land of the living,
so that his name will no longer be remembered!"

²⁰But you, O LORD of hosts, who judge righteously,
who try the heart and the mind,
let me see your retribution upon them,
for to you I have committed my cause.

Text Questions

I wasn't sure what verse 18 said, so I consulted another translation. That says, "Then YHWH (God) warned me, and I knew. God opened my eyes to their deeds." What did God warn Jeremiah about? (verses 18-19) Did Jeremiah suspect what was going on? (verse 19) What did Jeremiah's enemies hope to accomplish? Did they succeed? (verse 20) Note: there's a clue in

that we are reading about Jeremiah today! Why did Jeremiah hope and expect God to be on his side? (verse 20) If you would like, read the rest of chapter 11. Anathoth was Jeremiah's hometown, and his father was a priest there. In 12:6, we find out that even Jeremiah's family wanted to shut him up, however they could. Have you ever spoken what you know to be God's truth, and have everyone be against you? How do you think you would react if you were in Jeremiah's situation?

Psalm 54

God is my helper; it is the Lord who sustains my life. (Ps. 54:4)

¹Save me, O God, by your name;
in your might, defend my cause.

²Hear my prayer, O God;
give ear to the words of my mouth.

³For strangers have risen up against me, and the ruthless have sought my life,

those who have no regard for God.

⁴Behold, God is my helper;
it is the Lord who sustains my life.

⁵Render evil to those who spy on me;
in your faithfulness, destroy them.

⁶I will offer you a freewill sacrifice
and praise your name, O LORD, for it is good.

⁷For you have rescued me from every trouble,
and my eye looks down on my enemies.

Text Questions

If you ever are in Jeremiah's situation, this might be the psalm you would want to turn to. What does the psalmist pray? (verses 1-2) Why? (verse 3) Perhaps Jeremiah prayed, or even composed, this

psalm. How is the psalmist's situation like Jeremiah's? Why does the psalmist believe that God will help? (verse 4) What does the psalmist hope God will do? (verse 5) What does the psalmist promise in return? (verse 6) Is this the only time God has helped the psalmist? (verse 7) When would this psalm be appropriate for us to pray?

Second Reading

James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a

The wisdom God gives unites our hearts and minds. Instead of living to satisfy our own wants and desires, we manifest this wisdom in peace, gentleness, mercy, and impartiality toward others.

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. ¹⁵Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁶For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.^{4:}

¹Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ²You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on

your pleasures. ⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ^{8a}Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

Text Questions

What is James's advice to the "wise and understanding"? (verse 13) What does he want those to whom he is writing to avoid? (verse 14) If someone is boastful and lying, where does that "wisdom" come from? (verse 15) What is the result of such behavior and belief? (verse 16) How can we tell when wisdom comes from God (from above)? (verse 17) What is the end result of such wisdom? (verse 18) Is there anyone you don't want to make peace with? If there is, what does that tell you? (verse 4:1) What happens when we refuse to make peace, but instead act on our sinful nature? (verse 2) Why do we not get what we truly want? (verse 3) What happens when we ask for something that will only give us pleasure, and not bring peace? How does James say we are to act? (verse 7) What will happen when, with God's help, we resist the devil? How do you think we can "draw near to God"?

Gospel

Mark 9:30-37

Jesus' teaching and action in this text are directed to the church whenever it is seduced by the world's definition of greatness: prestige, power, influence, and money. The antidote to such a concern for greatness is servanthood.

³⁰[Jesus and the disciples went on] and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it;³¹for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three

days after being killed, he will rise again.”³² But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

³³ Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?”³⁴ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”³⁶ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them,³⁷ “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

Text Questions

Where was Jesus in this text? (verse 30) Remember that Galilee is his home region. (verse 30) Why does Mark say Jesus didn't want anyone to know that he was there? What was he doing? (verse 31) Did his disciples understand what he was saying? (verse 32) Why didn't they ask him? How do we know what he was telling them? I think the answer to that question is that "the Bible tells me so." Capernaum was the town where they lived. What did Jesus ask his disciples when they were "in the house"? (verse 33) Why wouldn't the disciples answer his question? (verse 34) It didn't matter—Jesus knew what they were saying. What did he want to teach them? (verse 35) Who did he use as an object lesson? (verse 36) What does he say about welcoming a child? (verse 37) Why do you think Jesus wants us to welcome children? How can we be like children, so that we are welcomed into the kingdom?