

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Fourth Sunday in Lent – Year B

RCL Readings – Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

ACNA Readings – 2 Chronicles 36:14-23; Psalm 122; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 6:1-15

Seasonal Introduction. Traditionally, Lent is a season of 6 weeks of preparation bringing us to the celebration of Jesus' resurrection.^{1 2} The early church felt that the celebration of the resurrection was something believers should diligently prepare for. Lent is a time of intention to deliberately walk deeper with the Lord in spiritual discipline involving prayer, acts of charity and fasting. We have now arrived at the fourth week of the Lenten season. For those of us that are fasting; we should remind ourselves that fasting is not the be all and end all of self discipline. The goal is not to have a successful fast only, but to apply ourselves to be better disciples of Jesus through the spiritual activity of fasting. Like all things with faith, fasting will have both personal applications and outward results in the attitudes and dealings we have with others.

Common Theme. There is always the question of how can God be good and kind and allow evil in this world? Our passages may not speak directly on that, but often the justice of God and the reproof of God is confused with evil (which is not of God). God's goodness and God's loving kindness cannot be separated from God's justice. If God never corrects us then surely we will continue to walk in darkness and propagate evil. If, on the other hand, we walk in His ways—never lied, stole, or killed—and do truth, perhaps the work of God would become that much clearer to the world.

Hebraic Context. Deuteronomy 18:5 prophesied that, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.' Since the time of Moses there was the anticipation that the Lord would raise up a prophet for His people in every generation. In some way all the prophets had characteristics like Moses but there developed the exegetical tradition during the 2nd Temple period that 'the prophet' was actually a singular

¹ The practice of communal fasting leading up to the Great Easter Vigil and Easter was common, as new believers (who had sometimes studied for a year or more in preparation) prepared themselves for baptism during Easter and their new communities joined them in the final days of preparation through fasting.

² While the early church did not immediately practice fasting for forty days before Easter, the practice of a forty day fast had fully developed by the 4th century. This came out of the examples in Scripture, most prominently Jesus' forty days in the wilderness as He approached His time of ministry. Moses' forty days on Mount Sinai and Elijah's journey to Mount Sinai are two additional forty day fasts.

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individual.³ There were many prophets and many prophets in Scripture, but the connection between the coming prophet like Moses and the prophesied Messiah was unclear and debated.⁴

While the gospels do not explicitly say that Jesus is the new Moses, there are hints in the texts that reveal how Jesus is being presented as such. Some of the characteristics that the new Moses would have would include: the ability to perform miracles, as Moses had done signs and wonders in the Exodus; the authority to teach the Torah, as Moses had instructed the Israelites; a unique relationship to God, as Moses spoke to God face to face; and provision of the bread of heaven, as Moses had provided the manna in the wilderness. Moses is always linked to the exodus from Egypt, the greatest act of redemption in the sacred history of Israel, and so the hope of the new Moses is in the context of a future age of redemption and salvation.

Numbers 21:4-9. The Israelites who had departed Egypt had begun to pass away in the wilderness. The generation that had seen miracles, eaten bread from heaven on a daily basis, and journeyed with God leading them as a pillar of fire was not to be the generation to inherit the promised land. It was to be their descendants (who also had eaten bread from heaven and had followed their God through the wilderness).

As the next generation began to approach the land of Canaan to prepare for the coming invasion, they continued to grumble and complain as their forefathers had done. The persistent miracles seem to have lost their mystery as the manna from heaven is called “worthless bread”.⁵ The Lord tolerated their complaints no longer and sent fiery serpents among them.⁶ The

³ Deuteronomy 18:15 can be read as relating to any prophet God raises up. In each successive generation God would raise up a prophet and, like Moses, they would speak God's word—prophets and prophetesses such as Deborah, Samuel, the prophets of the kings, Anna, Simeon, and John, along with the many unnamed prophets. But the sentence; “a prophet like me” can be read as referring to a single entity or person. Thus, another Moses was to be expected as a preeminent shepherd of the people. He would be a redeemer, challenge the kings of the earth, a lawgiver, miracle worker, and mediator for Israel and, later, the nations. Each generation would hold to the hope that their generation would herald the one like Moses.

⁴ In John 1:19-28, John the Baptist is asked if he was “the prophet”? John states that he was not (he also stated that he was not Elijah, a statement Jesus later corrected in Matthew 11:14—John was not infallible). John continues, however, and references Isaiah 40, a commonly held passage about the messianic age to come. In the passage, the Messiah, Elijah and the Prophet are all mentioned as figures of authority—there is a clear connection between the three but they are not always assumed to be the same person.

⁵ Manna was both described as having a taste “like wafers made with honey” (Exodus 16:31) and like “cakes baked with oil” (Numbers 11:8). The word used for “worthless” here appears only once in the Bible and so is hard to translate, however, the people dread the bread they eat each day and, in the LXX, they call their food “ἄρτους τῷ διακένῳ”, hollow, or empty, bread.

⁶ The literal Hebrew does describe the snakes as fiery (שרפים) and commentators are undecided as to what that really means, with comments suggesting a reddish orange coloured serpent with a venomous

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punishment from the Lord actually prompted the people to come to Moses and seek forgiveness and repent.

This raises an interesting question, what prompts people to turn to God? It usually isn't blessing. What follows next is actually quite Hebraic in character even though, on the surface, it appears as a form of idolatry. Moses prayed to the Lord for guidance and it is God who directs the people to erect an image of a bronze serpent.⁷ All who were bitten by these snakes were required to look at the image and then they would be healed. The image would only have an impact on people who were bitten by a fiery serpent and then who would look at it.^{8 9} The process is conditional at both ends. If you were not impacted by a snake then the bronze serpent was essentially irrelevant to you. The healing of the bite occurred not through believing that the bronze snake will heal you but through the action of gazing upon the image. Head knowledge that there was a cure was ineffective without application of the cure itself.

(burning) bite to something mythical (such as a dragon) or a snake literally on fire. In Isaiah 14:29, this is one of three types of snakes—specifically the kind that flies (also mentioned in Isaiah 30:6 as a flying snake). To further complicate the matter, the angelic beings that fly around the throne of the Lord crying, “Holy, holy, holy...” are also called the fiery ones, שרפים. Snakes, dragons, and angelic beings were often connected, such as in Genesis 3 and Revelation 12 or 3 Baruch 9. Nonetheless, John 3:14 simply translates the being as a serpent.

⁷ One of the important takeaways from the incident of the bronze serpent is that we discover that statues are not always the same thing as graven images. The construction of the serpent is a direct command from the Lord (who surely would not order His people to break the 2nd Commandment [or 1st commandment in some traditions]). The actual commandment includes the prohibition of worshiping images, which is not inherently a prohibition against their construction. Iconoclasm is not only destructive but against God's desire for us to make things that are beautiful to worship Him. God appears to have been perfectly happy with having 12 molded oxen as part of His Temple (I Kings 7:25; II Chronicles 4:4). But when Israel made a golden calf (Exodus 32:1-14), or two, (I Kings 12:28-33) to worship in a fashion against God's prescribed manner, that is when they broke God's command and God judged the people (Exodus 32:25-29; I Kings 13:1-10). The bronze serpent was not to be worshiped, unfortunately, it does eventually become an object for idolatry and is destroyed during the reforms of king Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4). Additionally, by the fourth century BCE, the image of a serpent on a pole being a symbol of healing found its way into the Greek pantheon in which the sigil of the Greek god of healing Asclepius was a snake on a pole.

⁸ This is another example of the Hebraic thought that beginnings and endings occur in a pattern. Serpents were the problem and so a serpent became the solution. At the same time, the people were struck because they grumbled about what God had provided, now they had to gaze on the thing God provided to be healed.

⁹ Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 3:8 asks a question, “Did the serpent kill, or did the serpent preserve life?” The answer that is immediately provided is, “Rather, when the Jewish people turned their eyes upward and subjected their hearts to their Father in heaven, they were healed, but if not, they rotted from their snakebites.”

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Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22. One of the major differences between the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (as opposed to deities of other people) is that God is good. Other deities may have been powerful or immortal, but they were never described as good. Goodness is one of the characteristics of God. When Moses desired to see God's glory, the Lord said He would show Moses His goodness (Exodus 33:19). The psalmist opened with the exhortation to give thanks to the Lord because of His goodness and His loving kindness—which endures forever. The word **חֶסֶד** *chesed* is sometimes translated as mercy, but really should be rendered 'loving kindness'.¹⁰ But what is good and what does mercy look like? The psalmist acknowledges that, while God is good, He still punishes people. Neither goodness nor loving kindness is in contrast to justice. The redeemed are urged to declare the goodness of God but we should take note that they are redeemed from the hand of the enemy.¹¹

The Psalmist described four scenarios that Israel went through in their history, often in trouble—sometimes due to circumstances and sometimes due to sin. In each of these scenarios Israel called out to God, He saved them, and they were to give Him thanks! All of these times of Israel crying out to God and Him listening would be encouraging for those in exile. Psalm 107:2-3 specifically mentions that God would gather His redeemed people from every direction.¹²

The reason for exile in Assyria and Babylon was because of transgressions and iniquity, which led the people on the path to She'ol, the gates of death. When disaster came, people cried to the Lord and, in His goodness, He came to save. He brought both His word and His healing, indicating that the people need both. Again we should note that blessing does not often lead people to cry out to the Lord. It is times of trouble which so often cause us to seek God. Regardless, the response to deliverance in Psalm 107 is thanksgiving, sacrifice, and a proclamation of what God has done, declared with rejoicing.

Hebraic Perspective. Faith in Hebrew is the word *emunah* אֱמוּנָה. The word first appears in the book of Exodus 17:12 during the battle of Amalek. Interestingly, the word faith is not found in the book of Genesis. In its first appearance in Exodus the word is translated as steadfast. It describes how Moses held up his hands, supported by Aaron and Hur. The word *Emunah* is not a noun, it is a gerund. In linguistics, a gerund is a non finite form of a verb—it describes a verb

¹⁰ The word mercy in Hebrew is רַחֲמִים *rechemim*.

¹¹ Redemption is not always a peaceful process, Biblical redemption can be a violent activity, such as the Exodus from Egypt.

¹² The four scenarios may reference the four cardinal direction God would bring the redeemed of the LORD back to the promised land: Psalm 107:4-9, wandering through the desert to the south; 10-16, in bondage and enslavement to the north (as Assyria and Babylon were often spoken of); 17-22, our passage for this week, which seems to refer to Numbers 21:4-9 in vs 18 to the east (around the land of Edom); 23-32, while many Christians will look towards Mark 4:35-41 where Jesus calms the storm, the specific situation the Psalmist is referring to isn't obvious but the most relevant sea for Israel is to the west.

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that you are doing. In English it is shown through the addition of ‘-ing’ to a word. So the verb to walk becomes walking when you are putting it into practice. The verb to read becomes reading and faith becomes ‘faithing’. Thus a better translation of *Emunah* would be faithfulness.¹³ Being faithful implies action. Moses simply didn’t believe that if he held his hands up it would be victory for Israel, he actually had to hold them up. Hence James will write in his epistle that faith without works is dead! Our faith in God and in His Messiah should coincide with our actions and behaviour. As Jesus says, do the truth (John 3:21).

Ephesians 2:1-10. The apostle Paul reminds us in this epistle that the Lord has created us to do good—not simply to be good, but to do good. Unfortunately, we chose corruption. The good news is this doesn’t have to be our final state. Paul began this passage by affirming that we are actually now ‘alive’ while never forgetting the state we had come from. Paul noted that during our fallen state we “walked according to the spirit who works in the children of disobedience”.¹⁴ God does not leave His people to the schemes of the enemy. It was when we were ‘dead in sin’ that God made us alive. This was a loving action by God.

God redeemed Israel from Egypt, a people who did not fully know Him or obey His laws, showing that redemption has always been an act of grace. Thus, Paul writes that it is by grace we are saved through faith.¹⁵ ¹⁶ Faith is a gift, but it is also an action.¹⁷ A gift however, needs to

¹³ Many orthodox Christians have a problem when the Bible clearly says that God is faithing, they may say, “God cannot have faith because He knows all things”. But faith has little to do with knowledge (nor of hope, in the wishy-washy sense of the word) in the Hebrew Bible—faith gives proof to those witnessing it. In Hebrews 11, faith isn’t the thing hoped for or the thing unseen, faith is the proof—existence or support—of things hoped for or unseen. And so the passage goes, God warned Noah of an event that, as yet, was unseen but by faith Noah acted by constructing an ark. Had Noah not acted, we would not have a witness of the God enthroned above the flood—a God of justice. In each of the cases spoken of in Hebrews 11, people acted—they did not stand and hope for something and, in the end, there was proof that God is and that He commends those who by righteousness are faithful. And what of the first example given in Hebrews 11:3? “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” We do not hope to see the universe, we see the universe by faith—because it is there. The word of God created it. Surely, the things we can be most assured about concerning things we hope for are the things that God has already been faithful in.

¹⁴ Paul called the enemy that both we and God have the ‘prince of the power of the air’. This is a unique title for our enemy, Satan. The evil adversary we call the devil is known by many names, or titles. Satan is not the actual name of the Devil. Other titles or descriptions include: Tempter, Beelzebul, prince of the demons, the evil one, and a roaring lion, among others. Isaiah 14:12 seems to give a special title, description, or name for Satan, הילל בן-שחר, Light bearer, son of the dawn.

¹⁵ The question of whose faith we are saved by is an interesting one. Our faith? The faithfulness of God? Or through the faithful Messiah? Or perhaps it is all of the above?

¹⁶ *Sola Fide* is the doctrine of justification by faith alone. However the word “alone” does not appear in Ephesians 2:8 nor in Romans 3:28 where it was added by Luther.

¹⁷ See Hebraic Perspective

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be received for it to be applicable. Christian theologians have wrestled with the tension between works-righteousness and obedience to God.¹⁸ Paul reminds us of the truth of the matter; that we have been created anew in the Messiah for good works and good deeds will always have a role in our walk of faith.

John 3:14-21. Jesus continues His conversation with Nicodemus by allegorizing the serpent in the wilderness (from Numbers 21) as a picture of the Messiah and his ministry. Jesus says that the Son of Man must be lifted up.¹⁹ ²⁰ Jesus declared that eternal life comes through belief in the one who is lifted up, that is Jesus.²¹

John 3:16 is probably one of the most well known passages from Scripture. This verse again demonstrates that love, like trust, is an action. God loves and so God sends. Jesus described how the light has come into the world. The Greek text describes a continual action, that is, the light has come and is still coming into the world to chase away the darkness. God loves the world but men love the darkness. Why do men love darkness and not the light? Jesus says it is because their deeds are evil. So, because God truly loves His creation He sent the Son while men trust in darkness and so do evil deeds. While John 3:16 is very well known, Jesus' final statement to Nicodemus is John 3:21, "Whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out to God". Jesus exhorts us to 'do the truth'. We are not only told to believe the truth, we are told to do the truth. Belief in Jesus implies an action to put that trust into practice and seek the light.

¹⁸ Some, like Immanuel Kant, would argue that if anything is done in return for a gift then the gift is no longer a true gift. But surely, if we receive a gift we should be thankful, we may even invite the gift giver for a coffee—not to pay the person back but as part of a continued relationship. In the case of God's gift to us, surely there shouldn't be an issue with entering into a good relationship with God by acting in a way that would please God. This is neither works salvation nor does it take away anything from God's great gift—nothing we do can diminish God's gift. But His gift includes the ability to be alive with Jesus and walk according to the good works God prepared that we should walk in.

¹⁹ The Son of Man here likely refers to the eschatological character that is found in the book of Daniel. In Daniel 7 the Son of Man enters the throne of heaven to be acknowledged by the Ancient of Days and given the dominion of the kingdoms of the world. Later, Jewish traditions linked the Son of Man with the Messiah. However, perplexingly to many, the Messiah in Daniel 9:24-26 is 'cut off', indicating a sudden death.

²⁰ John seems to use the term 'lifted up' ὑψωσεν (*hypsoon*) slightly differently to the other Gospel writers and the Epistles. The context of John's nuance of ὑψωσεν is clearest in John 12:32-34 to signify the crucifixion but could also apply to His ascension and exaltation in other passages (such as Acts 2:33, 5:31).

²¹ John never uses the word faith πίστις *pistis* in the Gospel (it is only found once in I John 5:4). Rather, John constantly uses the cognate πιστεύω *pisteuō* (belief) which carries with it the meaning of trust in something as well being convinced that something is true. The book of Genesis likewise does not include the word faith but rather describes the Biblical characters trusting and believing God, for example "Abraham believed God". For both Abraham and the continuation of Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus, this belief is paired with actions as belief and trust aren't passive.

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ACNA Readings

II Chronicles 36:14-23.^{22 23} This final reading in Chronicles implies that the Lord has a limit to sin—that is, He will only tolerate so much. Of course, this begs the question: what is that limit? There is no way to gauge how long God will tolerate sin nor measure the long suffering of God, so the obvious conclusion should then be, don't test it!

The context of our passage is that Nebuchadnezzar had defeated Judah and installed Zedekiah as a vassal king. Instead of learning anything from recent history or giving heed to the advice of the prophet Jeremiah, Zedekiah proceeded to follow the evil ways of his predecessors. But God was not idle during this time. The chronicler records the Lord sending unnamed messengers and prophets.²⁴ God did not wait until His patience ran out, “rising up early” He sent His messengers because of His compassion.²⁵

Tragically, the call of the Lord was rejected and mocked. Verse 16 notes that a limit had been reached saying, ‘until there was no remedy’. There comes a point in which God says He will no longer hear prayers, nor receive sacrifices. Once this point has been reached there is no

²² Chronicles was originally written as a single book in Hebrew, only split into two books in the Greek Septuagint. The book is an edited work. It takes a look at the histories that have been written and condenses or adds new material to existing records. Chronicles starts from Genesis (the genealogy of Adam) and continues on, using both the historical and prophetic books of the Bible (Chronicles was included as part of the writings while books like Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings were part of the prophets) as well as books that do not appear in the Bible nor that we have copies of but are only alluded to.

Being an edited work does not make it less Biblical or God-breathed but, like several other books in the Bible, it does mean that we can examine the theological movements of the time of its writing when comparing it to the books that it edits. Some events are excluded, such as David and Bathsheba's affair, while many texts delve into the spiritual context over and beyond the historical event as recorded in other texts.

²³ The Hebrew Scriptures doesn't conclude with Malachi but rather with Chronicles. This makes this passage the final concluding remark of the Bible. The Hebrew Bible ends with Israel in exile but with the hope of return and a God that will be with His people.

²⁴ While Jeremiah is named in II Chronicles 36:12, 21, and 22, verses 15-16 does not mention Jeremiah or any other specific prophet. We do know that other prophets besides those specifically mentioned in Scripture were used by God and, even among those spoken of in Scripture, several remained unnamed (until 2nd Temple, Rabbinic and Orthodox Christianity tradition named many of them). Nonetheless, they were still the messengers and prophets of God.

²⁵ Rising up early, הָשָׁחַם, in verse 15, is a word that is often used in the Scriptures when an event of import is needed to be done. Whether it was Abraham, who was told to bring his beloved son to the land of Moriah to offer him as a burnt offering, or Moses going before Pharaoh with God's demands, they rose early to do what God commanded. Rising early has the idea of doing something without delay.

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possibility for healing, there is only judgment.²⁶ In response, the Lord used the Babylonians to bring exile to His people.²⁷ Jerusalem is ransacked and the Temple of God is destroyed. All that remains of the kingdom of Judah are the 'poor of the land' (2 Kings 25:12). Interestingly, the chronicler connects the devastation brought by the Babylonians on the Jewish people with the failure to observe the Sabbaths of the land.

Cycles of time are important to God and central to Jewish life, both in the Scriptures and today. Called the *Sh'mitta*, there is a 7 year cycle of work and rest for the land itself in which debts are canceled and agricultural land remains fallow. Apparently, the Jewish people had neglected to observe this cycle for approximately 490 years which then set the limit of captivity at 70 years to fulfil the *Sh'mitta* obligation to the land of Israel.

The last events recorded in Chronicles took place at the beginning of the reign of Cyrus the Persian. God was declared, through the mouth of the pagan Gentile king Cyrus, to be sovereign over all kingdoms and Cyrus was commanded to rebuild both Jerusalem and the Temple as well as restore the Jewish people back to the land.²⁸ This promise of restoration is a strong enforcer of hope grounded in the mercy and long suffering compassion of God (who is King over all).

Psalm 122.²⁹ David starts his Psalm speaking of the house of the LORD. However, the tabernacle (משכן) is not mentioned (as such) from the end of Joshua's life until David himself requests to build a house for God (II Samuel 7:1-7). The tabernacle was set up in Shiloh (Joshua 18:1) but we know, in the time of Eli and Samuel, that the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant and from that time until the Ark was moved into the Temple it dwelt in random locations.³⁰ Why wasn't the Ark returned to the Tabernacle in Shiloh? What isn't mentioned in

²⁶ Although, when the people who remain cry out to God (see Psalm 107) He invariably hears them, redeems them, and wishes to dwell among them.

²⁷ The text notes they come from the land of the Chaldeans, the land of their forefather Abraham. This is another example of the Biblical pattern in which beginnings and endings often occur in the same way, on the same day, using the same people. The people of Israel began with the call of Abram the Chaldean and concluded with exile back to the land they were called out from. However, from exile, they would once more be called to the land of Israel.

²⁸ This does not mean that Cyrus became a God-fearer. Cyrus seems to have had a policy of restoring cultic sites within his empire to the original deities of that land. But God still used Cyrus to do His own will and even let Cyrus speak the last words in the Hebrew Bible—words that echo the message of the exodus, "May the LORD his God be with him."

²⁹ This is one of the four psalms of Ascent that are attributed to David (Psalms 122, 124, 131 & 133) Traditionally, the psalms of Ascent are thought to be used as songs and prayers by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the three pilgrimage festivals of Passover, Pentecost or Tabernacles.

³⁰ After being returned by the Philistines, the ark was in Beth Shemesh, Kiryat Yearim, the house of a foreigner (Obed-Edom), and finally in a tent in Jerusalem (but not the Tabernacle, משכן).

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Samuel is that after the Philistines defeated Israel and took the ark, they almost certainly continued on to Shiloh and sacked it, including the Tabernacle.³¹

From the time of Eli until David moved the Ark of the Covenant into a tent in Jerusalem, the people of Israel may not have had a “house of the LORD”. David’s family history is a family that was devoted to God and obedient to His word. However, as a child (or even an adult), where would his family have gone on pilgrimage without a Tabernacle? So when David finally brought the Ark to Jerusalem and put it in the tent he had prepared for it, he danced with all his might and provided bread, meat, and raisins to all the people.

Pilgrimage and coming into the presence of God was not considered a burden but rather a joy. David begins by stating, “I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the House of the Lord”. This verse sets the tone for the heart of the worshipper. Are they happy and joyful to encounter the Lord or are they performing this duty against their inner will? The same question applies to all Christians today: are we glad to go worship God or do we find it a burden?

Two themes move concurrently in the psalm. Jerusalem is a place of judgment but also a place of peace. Peace is a central thought in Judaism. One of the sacrifices in the Torah is called the Peace Offering שְׁלָמִים where the word peace is in the plural form. This led Jewish sages to comment on this plural nature concluding that peace is not restricted to earth but also a desired quality for heaven.³² David suggests that justice and peace go together. The worshipper was exhorted to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, a city that, through history, has known a lot of conflict and strife. When we pray for peace we are also praying for justice. Peace and prosperity are the fruits of justice, for a society of injustice cannot be a society of peace and safety. David asks of the Lord that those who do pray for Jerusalem will receive a blessing in return.

Jerusalem became the focal point for pilgrimage and a direction of prayer because the Lord had chosen to place His Name there. Under the kinship of David, Jerusalem would become the capital of the Israelite nation. It would also become the spiritual capital of the world—the place where God would build His Temple, call His people to gather regularly, and dwell among His people. David concludes the psalm reflecting that “because of the House of the Lord” he would seek the well being of Jerusalem. God had commanded the Israelites to construct a Tabernacle in order that He would dwell among His people (Exodus 25:8). David understood the joy of being in the house of God, for that meant being in the presence of the living God.

³¹ Jeremiah 7:11-15 corroborates the theory that Shiloh and the Tabernacle were sacked by the Philistines.

³² When Jewish people pray “*Oseh Shalom Bimromav*” they are asking for there to be peace in heaven. Similarly, in the Lord’s prayer, we pray that God’s will be done on earth and in heaven (καὶ in Greek is simply the connecting “and”, not necessarily “as it is”).

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John 6:1-15. The majority of John's gospel concerns itself with the things Jesus said and did in Jerusalem. This passage is one of the rare times that John records an event in the Galilee region. The miracle of the Feeding of the Multitude is only one of two miracles that were recorded in all four gospels—the other is the resurrection. Each gospel supplies some unique information not given by the others. John opened with the acknowledgment that the ministry of Jesus was gaining popularity. John also specifically mentions that it is the season of Passover, the second of three Passovers mentioned by John, but, as is typical of gospel writers, doesn't provide the name of the mountain where the event occurs. The parallel accounts of Luke 9 and Mark 6 both note that Jesus also taught the people, something that John and Matthew choose not to mention. However in Jewish tradition you sit down to teach and stand to read the Scriptures.³³ John notes that Jesus sat with His disciples so we can assume that this would involve some element of instruction as well, supporting the versions in Luke and Mark.

Luke's account of the miracle cites the location being close to Bethsaida (Luke 9:10) and this may be the reason Jesus asks Phillip, who is from Bethsaida, where they could procure supplies to feed everyone (rather than another disciple). Jesus already knows the size of the crowds would make locating enough supplies to be practically impossible and the disciples would probably be aware of the same issue. John noted this to be a rabbi-student test. The disciples have already witnessed Jesus do many miracles, healings, and purging of demonic activity. They have the eyewitness knowledge that He has power. However, other than the wedding at Cana, they had never seen Him create food on scale.

The gospels present Jesus as the new Moses. Moses had prophesied that there would arise a prophet like me (Deuteronomy 18) and one of the miracles God did in the time of Moses was provision of bread (manna) to the people. All the gospels agree that the only food available was five loaves of bread and two fish. But John provided the unique details that the food was supplied by a young boy and that the bread was made of barley and not wheat—barley was the grain harvested at the Passover season while wheat was harvested during the season of Pentecost.³⁴ John is the only gospel that calls the fish *osparia* ὀσπάρια which highlights its diminutive size, while the Synoptics simply call them *ichthus* ἰχθύες which simply means fish. Regardless, the meal of the young boy is not large enough to share with many people at all.

³³ See Luke 4:16-20 where Jesus stands to read from the prophet Isaiah and then sits down to give His sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth.

³⁴ In terms of literary archaeology, this sort of internal textual information provides good literary evidence for an eyewitness who had knowledge of the local culture.

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Fourth Sunday in Lent – Year B

As the people were instructed to sit down, Jesus made a blessing for the small fare in His possession.³⁵ ³⁶ The traditional blessing for bread, recorded in a discussion between Shamaï and Hillel, who are one generation prior to Jesus, is 'Blessed are you the Lord our God, you are the King of the Universe, You bring forth the bread from the earth' (Tractate Brechaot). In all probability this would have been the blessing Jesus used at the time. Jesus then produced sufficient bread for everyone, even with leftovers.³⁷ Who can produce bread? The blessing, common in that time, stated it clearly, You [God] bring forth bread. If only God can bring forth bread then who was this man, Jesus? The sign is not lost on the people who witness the miracle who immediately identify Jesus as the 'prophet', referring to the coming prophet who would be like Moses.³⁸ They seek to make Jesus king, but not the type of king that Jesus wanted to be identified with, so He retreated back to the unnamed mountain.

³⁵ Again, this shows an understanding of the time and culture in which the New Testament is set. According to Deuteronomy 8:10 the appropriate time to make a blessing or 'say Grace' is after a meal, not before. During the 2nd temple period, the Jewish sages had suggested that if making a blessing after a meal was good then making a blessing before and after must be better. By the time of Jesus, the practice of blessing before a meal was well entrenched.

³⁶ Jewish blessings do not bless the thing, be it food, drink or something else, rather they bless the Lord who made the thing. In Jewish understanding, saying a blessing over food does not make the food any better or any holier, instead you thank, and bless, the Lord for the food provided.

³⁷ The 12 baskets that are leftover may be referencing the 12 tribes of Israel. Some commentators suggest perhaps they represent the 12 disciples, although in actuality Jesus had many more disciples than 12.

³⁸ Normally, the gospels reference passages that refer to the Messiah God would send. But here the people clearly recognize that Jesus must be the one spoken of in the 2nd Temple doctrine surrounding Deuteronomy 18. This sign (creating bread) highlighted how Jesus is the new Moses as both produce bread from heaven. More importantly, this also demonstrates His authority and divine nature—Exodus 16 clearly details that it was not Moses or Aaron that would do a miracle of bringing bread from heaven but God Himself.