

**Sermon Notes from the Church’s Ministry Among Jewish People**  
12th Sunday after Pentecost – Year C

**ACNA Readings** – Ecclesiasticus 10:7-18; Psalm 112; Hebrews 13:1-8; Luke 14:1, 7-14

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

**ACNA Readings<sup>1</sup>**

**Introduction.** In the past week, we celebrated the feast of St. Mary. In the Daily Office lectionary readings, we read of how the angel Gabriel came to Mary with the news of her upcoming pregnancy and that the child she would bear would be the long-awaited Messiah. Mary’s response is remarkable, as she shows her faith in the Lord and in humility says, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” May we all have such faith when the Lord speaks and may we reply in like manner.

**Common Theme.** The common themes of the lectionary readings are concerned with pride, arrogance, humility, and hospitality. Pride is a common word in our age, and not simply as it relates to homosexuality and “pride month.” The spirit of the age teaches the elevation of the self as the highest form of man and that our self-fulfillment is the greatest goal. Yet, the Lord implores us to be humble, to remember that we are but dust and ashes, and that self-elevation will only lead to destruction. Instead, the people of God ought to walk humbly, seeking the good of others before ourselves and showing hospitality and love to those around us.

**Ecclesiasticus 10:7-18.** The reading from the Old Testament this week is one of the few times that we read from the “other Books”,<sup>2</sup> sometimes called the Apocrypha or Deuterocanonical books. The reading itself comes from Ecclesiasticus, meaning “Church book” also known as the Wisdom of Sirach, named after the author of the book. The book itself, according to the preface, was originally written in Hebrew by Jesus (or Joshua) son of Sirach, son of Eleazar (50:27) in 200–175 BC and translated by his grandson into Greek sometime around 117 BC. While for most of Church history, the only copies have been the Greek translation, fragments of the Hebrew have been found amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Cairo Genizah. These discoveries show that the work is indeed old and was amongst the Jewish people in the days of the Messiah.

The subject of the reading concerns the problems of pride and arrogance. Pride, according to Ben Sirach, is an evil attitude that is hateful to the Lord and people, causes the downfall of nations, and is unbecoming amongst men (vv. 7-9). Regarding this, Ben Sirach asks the question, “Why would dust and ash act arrogantly? For even in life his bowels decay?” (v. 7). Mankind, though an eternal creature, comes from the dust of the earth (Gen 2:7, 3:19, 18:27) and yet has this astounding propensity for lifting himself against the Lord his maker and other people made in the image of God. Pride brings out the worst in people. It is almost comical that a creature so low would puff itself up against the Lord of the universe and yet this is the story of mankind according to Ben Sirach. Nations

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<sup>1</sup> Editor’s note: This week the notes for the four ACNA passages come first and the notes for RCL OT readings follow starting on page 5.

<sup>2</sup> Article VI, “The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of 1571,” *The Book of Common Prayer (2019)*, (Huntington Beach, CA: Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019), 773-775.

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have crumbled over and over because of pride; the Lord overthrows empires due to arrogance (vv. 14-17).

Similarly, C.S. Lewis wrote in, “*Mere Christianity*” concerning pride,

It is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began. Other vices may sometimes bring people together: you may find good fellowship and jokes and friendliness among drunken people or unchaste people. But pride always means enmity—it is enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God.<sup>3</sup>

Ben Sirach cautions his readers that pride is not only the cause of much suffering but is foreign to mankind. Pride was not created for us and thus is not natural for a person to have it (v. 18). For a person to lift themselves in pride is to be against the creation that God called them to be. Rather, the Scriptures call us to be humble people, pursuing God and his qualities in our lives as his creatures living amongst other creatures made in his image. We as followers of the Messiah today, called to humility before our God, would do well to heed the wisdom of Joshua son of Sirach and rid ourselves of this foreign infection.

Quoting again from C.S. Lewis, who summed the test for pride quite nicely,

If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realise that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.<sup>4</sup>

**Psalm 112.** The psalm this week has no ascribed author. Indeed, there is no ascribed author for Psalms 111-121. A Jewish tradition states that if a psalm does not have an author listed, then its author is the last named psalmist in the immediately preceding psalms<sup>5</sup>. If so, then this psalm was penned by David as he is the author of Psalm 110. Whether this is accurate or not, there are several interesting things to note about this psalm. First, it is in the Fifth Book of the Psalms. This book's themes are praise, worship, restoration of Israel, and the Davidic King. Secondly, Psalm 112 is mirrored with Psalm 111. Whereas Psalm 111 is about the greatness of the Lord, Psalm 112 is about the greatness of the man of God. Thirdly, though both Psalms 111 and 112 begin with the phrase, “Praise the Lord!” (Hallelujah), they are not counted in the Hallel Psalms in Jewish liturgical tradition (Ps 113-118). Thus, they serve as a gateway to the Hallel Psalms. Fourthly, both Psalms 111

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<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity: A Revised and Amplified Edition, with a New Introduction, of the Three Books, Broadcast Talks, Christian Behavior, and Beyond Personality*. (HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 123–24.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis, 128

<sup>5</sup> David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Program in the Book of Psalms* (Newton Mearns, Scotland: Campbell Publications, 2003), 273.

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and 112 are acrostics – that is, there are twenty-two lines in both of these psalms and each of these lines begins with a successive Hebrew letter. This is significant as Book V of the Psalter also contains Psalm 119, the largest acrostic in the Hebrew Bible. The themes of 119 echo the themes of 111 and 112. Thus, Psalm 112, along with 111, serves as an acrostic gate to the Hallel Psalms which end with an even larger acrostic.

The theme of Psalm 112 is that of the man who fears the Lord. He is a man that obeys him and is blessed for it in both spiritual and physical ways. Additionally, this man is exalted for his kindness, mercy, and righteousness. This is shown in his attitude towards the poor and his confidence in the Lord despite troubles. In keeping with the general theme of the lectionary readings, this man is a humble man who does not lift himself with false airs. He does not hoard his wealth and take pride in them; he does not rely on himself and takes confidence in his understanding. He relies on the Lord, fears him, and gives generously. He does not lift his own horn, but his horn is lifted and exalted because of his attitude toward his fellow men.

**Hebrews 13:1-8.** The lesson from the Epistle concerns hospitality and contentment. In the age we occupy, it is easy to become self-conceited and forget to show love and hospitality to those around us. The author touches on several subjects: hospitality to strangers, visiting the persecuted in prison and the mistreated, faithfulness in marriage, contentment with money, and submission to Church leaders.

It is easy to neglect those around us, to let others suffer alone especially when we see that they are in need. Yet, the author calls to mind that there is a great blessing in humbling oneself, in being content with what one has and giving to those around us, whether they be strangers or fellow members of the body. Given that the exhortation in verse 1 is to continue in the love of the brethren, the ones in prison and the mistreated ones are fellow Christians who have been persecuted for the faith. Hence, we are reminded to humbly remember that we are in the same body as those who are persecuted (v. 3).

In marriage, the author exhorts his hearers to keep their marriage bed pure, not looking for more than the spouse that the Lord has given to them. Finally, we are called to be content with the possessions that one has and not be obsessed with money and financial gain. Thus, we can say with the psalmist, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” (v. 6). A life characterized by this kind of humbleness will not go unrewarded, either in this age or the age to come. This is shown in the final exhortation to remember their leaders who had taught them the gospel. Those leaders had lived a life like the one described, and they had been blessed for it. These people ought to be imitated.

This can be a difficult message for those of the current age. We live in a world that pushes people to want more. More selfishness, taking care of yourself first, not associating with low lives and the poor. More sex and infidelity and more looking for the next object to fill the void in the heart. We want to be our own spiritual gurus, knowing what is best for ourselves and not looking to anyone outside of ourselves. We presume ourselves to be competent judges. We attend churches, but if we

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are not fed in the way we believe best, we shop for a new shepherd. We do not know how to submit; we do not know humility, and the writer of Hebrew reminds us that this is not the way of God.

**Luke 14:1, 7-14.** In our lesson from the Gospel, Jesus tells a parable to a group of Pharisees that he was eating with on the Sabbath. Jesus notices how they arranged themselves at the table and took the opportunity to teach. The subject of this parable is that of taking the honor for oneself and the subsequent humiliation that might happen in such a case. The example Jesus gives is that of taking a seat of honor at a wedding feast, to presume the place of importance.

In many cultures around the world and especially first-century Israel, honor and shame are palpable. One example is shown socially in the position of seating. A wedding is an important social event, and the place of seating shows whom the hosts honor as important at their festival. Apparently, the closer one was to the front of the table, the more honored one was. If the wedding was Galilean, then there would be no formal “bridal party” and thus any number of guests might be an honored person, and this would not be known until it was time to sit down.<sup>6</sup> If one presumes to take a place of honor without explicitly being told to take it, they have stated, “I am one of the most important people here!” This is quite an arrogant stance to take. This might very well be rewarded with great shame, as one finds they are not as honored as they thought and are instead placed at the lowest seat, without any honor.

An idea of this is still seen today at weddings here in the West. Even if the reception does not have assigned seating, there are always tables reserved for families, the wedding party, and special friends. Imagine the embarrassment that would follow if there was a table for these close friends and one presumed to sit there without receiving an invitation and was subsequently asked to move to another table for the actual close friends. Imagine the honor one would receive if they sat at a common table and the groom himself asked them to sit at the “close friends” table. The contrast is stark.

Jesus then gives practical advice on the true blessing and obtaining true honor. Do good to those that cannot repay you. The example given is if one invites only those who can repay, or go above, then the honor is given back, and no blessing is given. The guests at Jesus’ meal were all Pharisees who were being honored in various ways and doubtless would invite one another at a later point with a different host. However, if one shows such kindness and hospitality to those who have no hope or means of repayment, then they honor the host, and the host can simply enjoy blessing others. This kindness is noticed by God and there is a reward in heaven for such humility.

This is exactly our relationship with God. We are the beggars and the lame who cannot repay the Lord for his kindness. We can only receive the benefits of his love and generosity. By doing so, we give him honor and he keeps it. We are honored by his invitation, and he is honored by giving us honor. Each time we gather around the Lord’s table, we do so as guests who cannot repay the meal he offers us.

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<sup>6</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, Updated Edition. (Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 140–41.

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**RCL Readings**

**Jeremiah 2:4-13.** Last week, we met Jeremiah and learned how God calls him and how Jeremiah protests. God was not to be put off, so he makes Jeremiah into a “pillar of iron” (1:18) able to speak truth to power. Now, in our reading, we have God’s first prophetic word to be announced by Jeremiah.

In the first three verses of chapter 2, God reminisces about his time with Israel in the wilderness. “This nostalgic beginning” and the divorce language of Jeremiah 3 “highlight the essentially relational nature” of God’s charges against Israel. Jeremiah is using the language of the covenant law-suit employed by the prophets before him.<sup>7</sup> Yes, Torah has been broken, as we see in the list of charges in verses 5-8. What God is decrying, however, is the broken relationship and his own broken heart. “Jeremiah’s message contains sharp accusation, severe warning, and chilling threat, but these are embedded in a passionate lament that pours out the pain of God—the pain and anger of betrayed love,” says Christopher Wright. This is the context in which all of Jeremiah (like Hosea) must be read. “This opening chapter calls us back again and again (as do the tears of Jeremiah himself) to remember that the God who speaks and acts thus is the divine Lover, the divine Husband, whose anger is drenched in the pain of love.”<sup>8</sup> Both Hosea and Jeremiah are echoing the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. We know the children of Israel were not perfect in the wilderness period, but “compared with the vile promiscuity of the present, the wilderness was pure honeymoon.”<sup>9</sup>

In verse 5, the word for “worthless” is הֶבֶל (*hebel*) meaning “a puff of wind, a triviality, something of no value, benefit or worth, something completely futile. It is the word regularly translated ‘vanity’ or ‘emptiness’ in the book of Ecclesiastes.”<sup>10</sup> So, nothingness is the value of those idols we seek and rely on – money, sex, power, fame, insert idol here – instead of trusting our Creator God for our physical and emotional needs. When we replace God with these things, we become like them, empty, like mere wisps of wind.

In verse 7, God charges Israel with defiling the land. “We think of pollution of the natural world as having to do with acid rain and unclean water, with smog and the loss of wetlands and oxygen-giving forests to bulldozers and shopping centers. But in the Bible God’s land is polluted by sin (Lev 18:24–30), by murder (Num 35:33–34), by the breaking of the law and covenant (Isa 24:5), by adultery (Jer 3:1), and especially by idolatry (Jer 3:2, 9; 16:18; Acts 15:20). Indeed, says Leviticus,

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Message of Jeremiah: Grace in the End*, ed. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2014), 60. See also Michael A. Fishbane, *Haftarot*, *The JPS Bible Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 263.

<sup>8</sup> Wright, 60.

<sup>9</sup> Wright, 61.

<sup>10</sup> Wright, 64.

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such sins are such an abomination to the Lord that the land will ‘vomit’ out the persons committing them (Lev 18:28), as the inhabitants of Judah were in fact to be ‘vomited’ out in 587 B.C.”<sup>11</sup>

Israel is not the only nation God removes from its land due to wickedness. When God promises Abraham the Land of Canaan for his descendants, he gives a timeline for the dispossession of the Amorites (Gen 15:13-16). God waited 400 years after Abraham to bring Israel into the Promised Land because “the iniquity of the Amorites [was] not yet complete.” We, too, in our modern nations, pollute our lands with violence, greed, and injustice. Let us not believe we are immune from God’s judgment. God may mercifully tarry to give us time to repent but, to paraphrase Ruth Graham, if God doesn’t judge our nations, he’ll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.

In Jewish liturgical tradition, a harsh judgment passage is often juxtaposed with concluding words of consolation and hope. In the synagogue, Jeremiah 2 is often closed with Jeremiah 3:4 or 4:1–2.<sup>12</sup> We see an echo of this hopeful balance in the pairing of Jeremiah 2 with Psalm 81.

**Psalm 81:1, 10-16.** The whole of Psalm 81 is a festive song remembering God’s salvation. While some commentators would connect this song to Passover, the jubilation of especially the early verses is more appropriate for Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles). Yes, Passover was inaugurated at the Exodus, but Sukkot looks back to the time of living in wilderness tents and celebrates God’s faithfulness during the 40-year ordeal.<sup>13</sup>

The psalm is part praise and part preaching, but our lectionary reading gives us mostly the preaching part. Still, the psalm is an integrated whole: “The preaching takes place in the context of praise, which is one aspect of the appropriate response to the preaching.”<sup>14</sup> God’s preaching here reveals the same thing God’s indictment in Jeremiah reveals: God loves his people and wants them to find their rest and prosperity in him and him alone.

The warning of this psalm is the same as Jeremiah 2 but delivered in a more hopeful tone: God will allow us to suffer the consequences of our actions if we persist in our sin (cf. Rom 1:24-32). Though God “lets us go our own way, his heart longs for us to choose a different path... God’s heart longs for us to follow him and to experience the blessings that flow from that faithfulness.”<sup>15</sup> Let us heed the psalmist and trust our Savior and worship him exuberantly!

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<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Achtemeier, “Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C,” in *The Lectionary Commentary: Theological Exegesis for Sunday’s Texts, Volume One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 409.

<sup>12</sup> Fishbane, 262.

<sup>13</sup> Allen P. Ross, “Psalms,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 853.

<sup>14</sup> Mark D. Futato, “The Book of Psalms,” in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol 7: The Book of Psalms, The Book of Proverbs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009), 268.

<sup>15</sup> Futato, 268.

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**About the RCL author.** The Rev. Cariño Casas is the Director of Communications for CMJ USA. She joined the CMJ family in 2014 as the media coordinator of Christ Church Jerusalem. She has a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies from Trinity School for Ministry and a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from Texas A&M University. She is the deacon at Grace Anglican Church in Edgeworth, Pennsylvania.