

Sermon: 11 September 2022  
O.T. Jeremiah 4: 11-12, 22-28  
Epistle 1 Timothy 1: 12-17  
Gospel Luke 15:

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I must admit that my bible reading could be more focussed, I don't exactly wander around, but find I am lead by interest and whatever else I am reading. Several of my discussions over the last few weeks or so have been around our lectionary. Our three year Sunday Lectionary cycle is noted as an international, ecumenical treasure. Most Sunday's, most Christians all around the world are mostly reading the same text of scriptures eg common prayer, common worship on an incredible scale. One of the aims here at St Hilda's is to increase our rhythms of prayer.

A couple of the questions that arise are: should not readings relevant to what is happening today/this week be chosen? And "but the readings do not connect?" Bosco Peters goes on to hint: for most of the Church Year the readings are NOT connected – that is not how the Lectionary (or Liturgy generally, or humans for that matter) work."

Many of you will remember John Boniface quoting from C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*. Bosco Peters also quotes "where a senior devil called Screwtape is writing to his nephew, a junior devil called Wormwood, giving him advice on how to entrap 'a human called 'the Patient'. [The Vicar] has deserted both the lectionary and the appointed psalms and now, without noticing it, revolves endlessly round the little treadmill of his fifteen favourite psalms and twenty favourite lessons. We are thus safe from the danger that any truth not already familiar to him and his flock should ever reach them through Scripture. *Letter XVI. Biblical Illiteracy By Bosco Peters September 8, 2022 liturgy.co.nz*

We are currently in the third year (year C) cycle. And most of the Gospel readings will be from Luke. Year A (Matthew) commences on the first Sunday of Advent 2022, followed by Year B (Mark) Advent 2023. "It is important to bear in mind that a lectionary is not so much a daily Bible reading scheme as a provision for reading the Scriptures in the course of the daily round of worship of the Church. Thus, most, but not all, of the Bible is read." For those interested, there are copies in the office and it is available on line and through the diocese.

And so to today's readings – thank you readers. Is there a common thread in these three readings, is there something ('always', I can hear some of you saying) that we can take for us today, here, in this parish?

Our Old Testament reading takes us deeper into Jeremiah and verses 12-12 predict destruction. The second portion, Verses 22-28 "Steed Davidson" refers to "as a series of unfolding acts of uncreating.

Of 1 Timothy 1:12-17 a passage which a first glance seems to be all about Paul is in reality all about God and his grace and love." Tom Wright says "God has taken the wildest, most violent of blaspheming persecutors, and has transformed him into not only a believer but

also a trusted apostle and evangelist. If God can do that, there is nobody out there, no heart so hard, no anger so bitter, that it remains outside the reach of God's patient mercy."

Our Gospel reading from Luke has the two well-known parables: the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. Pick up on the parallels between them:

"which of you men" in v. 4 "what woman" v.8

"go after .....until he found it" v.4 "sweep .....until she found it" v8

Lost sheep, lost coin

Joy in both stories over the repentance of sinners.

Rejoicing v. 5 & 9

What image do we get of God in these readings? As one writer put's it will the real God stand up? The God of judgement "Now it is I who speak of judgement against them" in Jeremiah, "grace of our Lord" in 1 Timothy and "Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents".

Contrast the "tax collectors and sinners come to 'listen' to Jesus; with Jeremiah's "for my people are foolish, they do not know me". The tax collectors and sinners know they are in the wrong and listen to 1 Timothy similarly Paul who holds his sins as shame and at the same time inspiration "saved to serve".

"Judgement has carried negative overtones for a good many people "says Tom Wright: but we need to remind ourselves that judgment is a good thing, the thought that there might be a time where the injustice, the violence the oppression we see in the world is put to rights and is indeed good news. However the 'grumbling' Pharisees well remember Jeremiah and the devastation, and have no wish to have the hot wind of God blow down, they will stick to the rules until God comes to redeem his people. Here in Luke as in the earlier chapters, Jesus is going around breaking all the rules, consorting with those the sinners and tax collectors. Where would I be in the Luke reading? Sitting with those the Pharises warn about.

Tom Wright again: "people who believe that Jesus is already Lord, and that he will appear again as judge of the world are called and equipped (to put it mildly) to think and act quite differently in the world from those who don't.

Belief in a God that will find us, whom he loves the lost is more clearly found in the parables. But listen to the gratefulness in 1 Timothy as Paul states the God who chose (me), the God who trusted (me), God who appointed (me), God who empowered me to serve. Through Jesus, Paul is made and example, a pattern to what can happen to those who come to believe. A saint is someone who makes it easier to believe in God, and that a saint is someone in whom Christ lives again.

There are themes of both judgement and God's grace and mercy across these readings. As Fred Craddock states: "When you need a God to stand up for you, that's the One you have. And this God will do more than just stand up. This God will come looking for you to bring you home.

What do we do with this today?

Is it the promise of hope and if so -

Lord, come looking for us, even and especially in our despair. Help us to know that judgment is not the final word, but that in hope we will find redemption. For us, may Hope be another name for Jesus, for it is in his name we pray, Amen.

Is it the acknowledgement of God's presence in our lives?

In the last words of the last Christmas Broadcast of HM Queen Elizabeth II Dec 25, 2021

"Jesus whose teachings have been handed down from generation to generation, and have been the bedrock of my faith. His birth marked a new beginning.

As the carol says, "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight",

And the last verse of our Timothy reading

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen

A collect from Bosco Peters:

Let us pray (in silence) [that we may love God in our hearts and in our actions] *Pause*

Lord, [or God of Compassion]

Direct our hearts

By the action of your mercy,

For without your help

We cannot please you,

Through Jesus Christ'

Who is alive with you,

In the unity of the Holy Spirit,

One God, now and forever,

Amen