

Sunday on August 7 - 13 (Proper 14)

Old Testament Lesson: Job 38: 4-18

The story of Job is a familiar one: Job has been **blessed** by God, but Satan **challenges** God by saying that Job loves God **only** because God has prospered him. So God allows Satan to attack Job, taking away **everything** that he has except his wife and his life. Then Satan attacks his **health** with painful sores that cover his entire body. Job has three “friends” who come to comfort him by accusing him of gross **sin**, saying that to suffer such as he has must be because God is **angry** at him for some sins. Job, of course, **protests** his innocence. But he **protests** to the extent that his words are ones of **self-righteousness** and not a defense of God’s **inscrutable ways**. It is then that **God** addresses **Job**, saying that if he **knows** so much, then please answer the questions that God is now going to give to him.

Listen carefully to these questions. In truth, no human being **today** knows the real answers to them, with the possible exception of one question.

Epistle Lesson: Romans 10: 5-17

St. Paul now turns his attention to a new topic: **How** does one get to be saved? He offers three options:

—Per **the Law** given through Moses; whoever keeps the **entire** Law will be saved. Obviously, **that** doesn’t work, since everyone not only has inherited Adam’s **original** sin, but also **sins** him/herself. (Read **Romans chapter 1** for a review).

—Somehow **ascend into Heaven** to bring Christ the Messiah down to earth. Again obviously, **that** is not the correct answer, since Jesus has already come down to earth.

—Somehow **descend into hell** and raise Jesus from the dead. And again, quite obviously, **that** is not the correct answer, since God has already raised Jesus from the dead.

So then, what **is** the correct answer? St. Paul answers, it is in your **mouth**: simply **confess** that Jesus is Lord, and **believe** in your **heart** that God raised Him from the dead. After all, **saving faith** is that where one **believes** in his heart and **confesses** with his mouth that Jesus is Lord, who suffered the **punishment** for **our** sins. And it makes no difference whether one is **Jew** or **Gentile**: the **identical** faith is required of **everyone** in order to be saved.

But then St. Paul makes his pitch for **missionary** work: how can anyone believe in someone they have never **heard** of; and how can they hear that message if no one is **preaching** it? And how can anyone preach it unless they are **sent**? Bottom line? **Faith comes from hearing the Word of Christ.**

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 14: 22-33

Continuing our story from last week, where Jesus miraculously fed 5,000 men (plus women and children), he immediately orders his **disciples** to get into the **boat** and head for the opposite shore. That would not create a problem, since Jesus is still there, dismissing the crowds. But once the people are gone, rather than resting or sleeping, Jesus heads up a mountain to **pray**. And he prays for **hours!** But during this time, the boat is **struggling** to make progress because of a strong **opposing** wind. Finally, after 3 am, Jesus finally finishes praying and heads toward the disciples, walking on the water. In his white robe, Jesus apparently looked like a ghost to the disciples, but Jesus reassures them. Impetuous **Peter** then asks whether he might come to Jesus on the water. Of course, Jesus says, **“Of course.”** And Peter starts walking on the water toward Jesus. But when his faith is distracted by his **circumstances** (the wind and waves), he starts to **doubt**. And **immediately** he begins to sink. Jesus saves him by stretching out his arm (that **still** must have been a long stretch!) and asks, **“Why did you doubt?”** Amazingly, as soon as Jesus gets into the boat, the storm ceases, prompting the disciples to **worship** him as the Son of God.

Sunday on August 14 - 20 (Proper 15)

Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 56: 1 and 6-8

In today's reading, Isaiah addresses ***another*** theme in his book, that of ***who*** will be acceptable to God, and ***what*** God will do for those He accepts. First of all, Isaiah quotes God as saying that the following will be characteristic of those whom God will save:

- those who do ***justice*** and ***righteousness***,
- those (even foreigners) who minister to and love and ***serve*** the Lord,
- those who keep the ***Sabbath*** and do not profane it, and
- those who keep the ***covenant relationship*** with God.

In turn, God says that He will do the following for these folks:

- He will bring them to His ***holy mountain*** (that is, Jesus, the Messiah),
- He will give them ***joy*** in their worship, and
- He will ***accept*** their offerings and sacrifices.

Then God notes that His house of prayer is for ***all*** peoples, including those considered ***outcasts and rejects*** by the Jews.

Epistle Lesson: Romans 11: 1-2a, 13-15, and 28-32

St. Paul continues his discussion from two weeks ago about ***who*** will be saved. You will recall that he was in ***anguish*** over his own relatives in the ***flesh*** who were rejecting Him, the promised Messiah. So then he asks rhetorically, has God therefore ***rejected*** the Jews? The answer is “no,” as long as they turn ***back*** to him. Then St. Paul remarks that he tries to get the Jews to become ***jealous*** of the ***Gentiles*** who ***are*** being saved, in the hope of the Jews turning back to God and thus being saved.

Then St. Paul helps us understand the ***relationship*** of Jews to God ***today***. If they have ***rejected*** Jesus, they are ***enemies*** of God. But, as with all people, the Jews are still ***elected*** by God to be saved, that is to say, the offer of salvation through the work of Christ Jesus is still ***available*** to them. Just as ***Gentiles*** are

saved by hearing and accepting through **faith** the message of Jesus the promised Messiah, so too **Jews** are saved by the identical process. After all, both Jews and Gentiles are sinners, therefore God shows the **same** mercy to **all** who believe in the finished work of Jesus.

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 15: 21-28

Jesus has moved from the **eastern** coast of the Sea of Galilee back to **Galilee** itself, where He had **another** encounter with the **scribes and Pharisees** who are still pushing **their** traditions and commandments. After dealing with them, He pushes westward, ending up in the region of **Tyre and Sidon**. This is the region from which Queen **Jezebel** came some 900 years earlier, known for its worship at that time of the Baals and Asherahs, the male and female gods of fertility. Obviously, a true Jew would have no dealings with **anyone** from there. And this appears to be **Jesus'** approach as a Canaanite woman from that region comes to him, **pleading** that He heal her daughter of a **demon**. Notice what she calls Jesus: 'Lord,' and "Son of David." In other words, she is recognizing him as the promised Messiah. Even though a Gentile, she has heard about a promised Messiah and about Jesus, and has believed: she has saving faith!

But though Jesus ignores her, she keeps following Him and pleading for mercy. Finally, even the **disciples** cannot stand it any longer, resulting in Jesus telling the woman that He was sent only to the lost sheep of **Israel**. The woman **still** continues to plead for her daughter, prompting Jesus to tell her that it is not right to give the children's food to the **dogs** (the Jews' insulting name for **Gentiles**). The woman **ignores** the insult and says that that may be **true**, but the dogs still get the **crumbs**, indicating that she **still** can humbly justify receiving a miracle from Jesus. Jesus is amazed at both her **humility** and her **faith**, and grants her request.

Sunday on August 21 - 27 (Proper 16)

Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 51: 1-6

Although Isaiah was a prophet to the **Southern** Kingdom, or **Judah**, surrounding the time of the dispersion of the **Northern** Kingdom in about 720 B.C., in today's lesson we find him speaking to the citizens of the Southern Kingdom while they are in **Babylonian Captivity** starting in 585 B.C., some 140 years **later**. He encourages the readers of this message to **trust** the God of their fathers, not only for deliverance from **captivity** in the near future but for deliverance from the **slavery to sin** by God's Messiah, who is coming. Therefore God encourages the readers/listeners to be comforted both **now**, in the **future**, and in **eternity**.

Epistle Lesson: Romans 11: 33 - 12:8

In the verses immediately preceding today's reading, St. Paul explains to the Roman Christians that God has called both Jews **and** Gentiles to **repentance** and **faith**. That is because **both Jews and Gentiles have rebelled and been disobedient to God**, and therefore God can be merciful to **both** Jews and Gentiles. These are the thoughts that lead St. Paul to exclaim how incredibly **wise** and **knowledgeable** God is. And in the light of God's great **mercies** to us, St. Paul commands the readers/listeners to express their **gratitude** to God by setting themselves apart (*i.e.*, to be **holy**) by **not** being of the same mind as the world but **rather** by letting God **transform** their mind to be pleasing to Him in their thoughts, words, and deeds. For us, that would show itself

- by our stopping being **proud** or feeling **superior** to others in any way, or looking **down** on others;
- by not **criticizing** others;
- or by not treating others **disdainfully**.

This is because **each** believer has been **gifted** by God with certain abilities and capabilities that are different from other believers. It is when we recognize and **respect** others' talents (and **overlook** others' lack of talents in other areas) that God is able to use us **effectively** as **one** body in Christ.

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 16: 13-20

Jesus' ministry has been plagued by two continuing obstacles:

- The religious leaders **fanatically oppose** him because he doesn't accept **their** man-made rules and regulations.
- The people are looking for a Messiah who will be a **political and military** leader, overcoming the Romans and making the **Jews** the world's **superior** people, which they are convinced they are.

In today's reading, Jesus pauses with his disciples in order to find out **directly** from them what **their** perspective is on his ministry. This prompts Peter to blurt out his famous **confession** that Jesus is **the** Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Jesus responds with the following statements:

- It is on this **bedrock of faith** and **confession** that He will be able to build His Church.
- The gates of hell will not be able to **withstand** the Church's march to **victory** over the devil, the world, and even our own flesh.
- His **disciples** will be given the **keys** to the Kingdom of Heaven, keeping the doors **locked** for those who **refuse** to repent and believe (thus **not** having their sins forgiven), but **opening** the doors to those who **repent** and **believe** (thus having their sins **forgiven**).

Then, to the disciples' amazement, he tells them **not** to tell others that he is the **real** Messiah, because the peoples' expectation of the Messiah was for **worldly** gain, **not** for **heavenly** treasure.

Sunday on August 28 - September 3 (Proper 17)

Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 15: 15-21

As you may recall, God called Jeremiah to be His prophet when Jeremiah was still a **youth**, and he served in this capacity for over 40 years. His ministry began during the reign of King **Josiah**, the **Southern** Kingdom's most **righteous** king, who attempted to **undo** his father's introduction of every kind of idolatry and stimulate a revival. Unfortunately, the **succeeding** four kings were all evil, and they led the nation **back** into idolatry. This culminated in the Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah's ministry was to **support** King Josiah but to **rebuke and warn** the nation during the reigns of the last four kings.

In today's lesson, we find Jeremiah **complaining** to God: despite his **delivering** God's call for repentance and keeping himself **pure** from the nation's rebellious ways, Jeremiah finds himself being **persecuted and abused**. Jeremiah therefore calls on God to take **vengeance** on his persecutors, but he also wonders whether God has abandoned **him** to his enemies, since he is getting **no** relief from his pain and suffering.

God takes **exception** to Jeremiah's accusation, and calls for **Jeremiah** to repent. And God promises that if Jeremiah **does** repent and **continues** to speak God's messages, He will make Jeremiah like a **bronze wall** over which his enemies will **not** be able to prevail, and He will **deliver** Jeremiah out of the hands of his enemies.

For the Christians of **today** who are experiencing **severe** persecution and oppression, these are indeed words of **encouragement** as well as a call from God for us to **continue** to trust Him and **believe** that He still is in control.

Epistle Lesson: Romans 12: 9-21

St. Paul here gives multiple recommendations for the behavior of true Christians, including

- abhor **any** kind of evil,
- genuinely love one another with **brotherly** affection,

- serve the Lord **fervently**,
- be **patient** during tribulation, being constantly in prayer.
- give your charity to the **needy saints**,
- show **hospitality**,
- bless those who **persecute** you (how contrary is this to **your** nature?),
- empathize** with others, whether they are rejoicing or weeping,
- live in **harmony** with others (especially within your own family!),
- do not be **haughty** or think you are **superior**,
- live in **peace** with others (as far as it depends on **you**),
- do not take **revenge** on others, but leave that to **God**,
- and finally, do not surrender to **evil** intent, but instead **overcome** evil by doing **good**.

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 16: 21-28

Our Gospel Lesson finds Jesus trying to **prepare** his disciples for his coming torture and death, this at the hands of the **religious** leaders! The disciples are **incredulous**, and Peter, the spokesman, insists that this must **never** happen. Jesus in turn **rebukes** Peter, since Peter's hope flies in the face of **God's** plan for mankind's redemption.

Then Jesus tries to prepare his disciples for the life of a **practicing** Christian. It **isn't** going to be easy! Because it will require setting aside your **wants** in order that God's **will** is carried out within your **family** as well as with your **neighbors**. Then Jesus explains that if we focus on getting **our** wants and perceived needs, we may **eventually** get that, but it may be at a **cost** that we ignored: our **salvation**. Jesus then makes it very clear that He will reward each person according to **what they have done**, whether it is according to **God's** will or whether it is according to **your** will.

So the big question is, who is number one in **your** life? In church, it is so easy to say that God is number one; but the issue is, how do you behave at **home**?