

## Sunday on July 31 - August 6 (Proper 13)

### ***Old Testament Lesson: Ecclesiastes 1: 2 and 12-14; and Ecclesiastes 2: 18-26***

Don't you just **envy** those folks who have a big **house**, or a luxury **new car** every year, or those who go on weeks-long **vacations** every season? It has been said that, for Americans, one **never** has enough income to do what you want to do, no matter what your income level is. Another wag said it slightly differently: expenses rise to **exceed** income.

The **Preacher**, the author of **Ecclesiastes**, comments on this from a **different** perspective: why should one work like **crazy** to earn enough income to **do** all the things you want to do or **buy** the things you want to have, when your life will be cut **short** by heart disease or stroke, and someone **else** will get to spend all that you have earned? After all, what **does** one get from all that work besides **grief** and **stress**? **King Solomon**, who is the "Preacher" in this case, was given **incredible** discernment and wisdom by God, and accomplished much. But his conclusion, after all his labors, was that we should content ourselves with **whatever** God has blessed us, and **forget** about striving after the wind.

Then again, Jesus gives us still a different perspective when he relates the story of the **talents**: God rewards us according to what we **have** done with what he **has** given us, not what he **hasn't** given us (**Matthew 25: 14-30**). The issue, in other words, is our **attitude** toward what we have or don't have, and what we do with what we **do** have.

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### ***Epistle Lesson: Colossians 3: 1-11***

In our epistle lesson, St. Paul addresses our **attitude** toward **earthly** things in a rather blunt way. As Christians, we are to be focused on furthering **God's** kingdom rather than seeking **earthly** pleasures and treasures, which St. Paul identifies as **covetousness**—in other words, **idolatry**! St. Paul even goes on to say that **common** human failures, like anger, slander, obscene talk, and even

**lying**, must no longer be a part of our life because we are now being **renewed** into the image of our Creator.

So St. Paul is admonishing us to examine our **attitudes** much more carefully to ensure that we have **indeed** put off our **old** self and replaced it with our **new** self in Christ.

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### ***Gospel Lesson: Luke 12: 13-21***

Today's Gospel lesson finds Jesus being asked to arbitrate an inheritance. Jesus calls it as it is: **covetousness**, and warns that the **bottom line** for one's life is not how many **toys** one has when he dies, but rather how much **treasure** he has stored away in **heaven** by focusing on the furthering of God's kingdom while he is alive. To illustrate his message, Jesus then tells the parable of a **rich** man who prospered so much in his profession that he built a **larger home**, made more **investments**, arranged for a line of **liquid assets**, bought an **island**, built a magnificent **beach house**, and bought a gorgeous **yacht**. What else was there to do but eat, drink, and enjoy life with his many **new** friends. But God called him a **fool**. **Why?**

Because after all this planning and **work**, God was going to require his **soul** at the appointed time, which was **now**. He was **not** going to eat, drink and be merry for even a **day**!

## Sunday on August 7 - 13 (Proper 14)

### ***Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 15: 1-6***

Some years **prior** to today's discussion of God with Abram, God had called Abram out of a family that worshipped **idols**. Even though there is no evidence that Abram had had an encounter with God **previously**, he nevertheless answered God's call to **pack up** his family and all their goods, and go to a land which God would **eventually** show him. It is amazing that Abram responded positively to a call from a God he **did not know**. But this prepares us for the **promise** that God makes to Abram today: Abram again simply **believes** God, in this case that God will give him as many **descendants** as the stars in the heavens that he can count. Little did Abram realize that there were as many as 400 **billion** stars in our Milky Way galaxy alone. But more importantly, it is that simple **faith** in God's word that allows God to declare Abram **righteous**, and to include him in the record in **Hebrews chapter 11** as one of the **giants** of the faith.

Incidentally, do not forget that, since **you** believe God today by accepting Jesus as your personal savior from sin, **you** are **included** in the stars that Abraham was looking at.

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### ***Epistle Lesson: Hebrews 11: 1-16***

The lesson for today is merely a portion of the great men-and-women-of-faith chapter, **Hebrews chapter 11**. Suffice it to say that it would be **most** instructive to not only read the **entire** chapter when we get home, but also to read those chapters in the Old Testament that describe in greater detail the actions and faith of these Old Testament believers that led God to include them in this chapter. The bottom line is that **people of faith believe God**. And this faith begins with believing that God **created** the universe out of **nothing**; he **spoke** it into being! And then the listing of the men and women of faith begins: first Abel for offering a **pleasing** sacrifice (he had the right **attitude**), then Enoch because he **pleased** God (wouldn't you like God to say that about you?), then Noah **trusting and obeying** God, and then Abraham and Sarah—again for simply **believing** God. And all of them had this faith that believed that God was calling them to **another**

country, a **heavenly** one. They all acknowledged that they were simply **strangers**, exiles, and pilgrims on **this** earth, individuals representing **God's** kingdom. We are thus reminded of **last** week's lessons, which warned us against lusting for **earthly** pleasures and treasures, but rather admonished us to focus on representing God's kingdom in **word and deed**.

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**Gospel Lesson: Luke 12: 22-34 (35-40)**

Jesus is in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount when he decides to address the **propensity** of people to **worry** about their earthly needs. Today's Gospel Lesson thus continues the thoughts from last week, namely that we are **not** to concern ourselves with **earthly, material** things, but rather to lay up treasures in **heaven** by focussing on and furthering **God's** kingdom. God then can **assure** us that, just as he takes care of the birds in the air and the plants in the field, so the can take care of **us**—**if** we are willing to **let** him.

But then Jesus issues a **warning**: we are to be **ready** for Jesus' arrival at **any** time, whether it is on the day we die or when Jesus comes for the second time. And **how** are we to be ready? By busying ourselves with the work of the **Kingdom** that God has given us to do, rather than striving to serve **ourselves** by running after the things and pleasures of this **world**. And like the rich man in **last** week's gospel lesson, Jesus may require our soul at a time that we do not **expect**.

## Sunday on August 14 - 20 (Proper 15)

### ***Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 23: 16-29***

The **Northern** Kingdom, created around 930 B.C., shortly after the death of King Solomon, from its **inception** worshipped only **idols**—initially the two golden **calves** made by its first king, Jeroboam, but later also the Caananite idols Baal and Asherah. **Many** prophets (including Elijah and Elisha) were sent by God to call the people to **repentance**, but with no response, leading ultimately to the **demise** of the Northern Kingdom and the **dispersion** of its people throughout the Gentile world around 722 B.C.

The **Southern** Kingdom, or **Judah**, **vacillated** between righteous and unrighteous kings during this same period, but then spiraled into a continuum of idolatress kings (with the single exception of **Josiah**) until the people were taken captive to **Babylon** around 585 B.C. During the last 40 years or so of its existence, God sent the prophet **Jeremiah** in an attempt to call Judah to **repentance**. Unfortunately, Judah had many others who called **themselves** prophets of God, claiming to speak **for** God. It goes without saying that **these** prophets encouraged the kings to go their **own** way, and supported the kings and the people in whatever way **they** wanted to live. Perhaps St. Paul had this in mind when he penned to Timothy, “**For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.**” 2 Timothy 4:3-4

In today’s lesson, God through Jeremiah confronts these **idolatress** prophets, noting that since **they** have never heard God’s voice, how could they be speaking God’s **words**? God then notes that these prophets **and** the people will be **judged**, because God is fully aware of not only their **lies** but also their **deeds**.

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### ***Epistle Lesson: Hebrews 11: 17-31 (32-40) and 12: 1-3***

For those of you who have not had the opportunity to read the remainder of **Hebrews, chapter 11**, as was suggested last week, I have good news for you! We are going to read the remainder of the chapter today. This chapter, dealing

with the **giants of faith**, continues with the story of Abraham, how he **trusted** and **obeyed** God when asked to sacrifice his only son Issac because he knew that God had already promised that it would be **through** Issac that Abraham would have as many descendants as the stars in the sky. The chapter continues with the naming of Moses' parents, Moses himself, Rahab in Jericho, and many others, who **believed and obeyed** God in spite of their **circumstances**. Finally, the author of Hebrews notes that even Jesus endured **mocking, shame, and crucifixion** in order to do with **joy** God's will. So if all of **these** people can trust and obey God during trials, temptations, and **persecution**, surely we can lay aside **our** recurring sins and not grow **weary** of being a Christian, **enduring** the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

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### **Gospel Lesson: Luke 12: 49-53 (54-56)**

As Jesus continues his Sermon on the Mount, he notes the **trials and tribulations** that he will ultimately have to endure, calling it a **baptism**. But then he notes that his coming will not bring **peace** to the inhabitants of the earth but instead **division**. This division, or **baptism**, experienced in order that **all** people might be saved, would divide people into those who **believe** and those who do **not**, even within the same household, in effect separating the gold from the dross like a **refiner's fire**.

But then he **chastises** the crowd, noting that they can tell what the **weather** is going to be by looking at the clouds and verifying the direction of the wind, but cannot recognize the **spiritual implications** of the events happening around them.

Come to think of it, do **we** do any better?

## Sunday on August 21 - 27 (Proper 16)

### ***Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 66: 18-23***

Last Sunday we learned that the prophet **Jeremiah**, appointed by God when he was a teenager, was God's voice to the kings and people of **Judah** in a time when they were spiraling deeper into **apostasy**. We should be aware that God was reaching out to the kings and people of Judah **long** before the time of Jeremiah. In fact, God sent the prophet **Isaiah** to them just as the apostasy began, over **110 years** before Jeremiah was called. The previous readings from the book of the prophet Isaiah—read 9 and 7 weeks ago—dealt with God going **out of his way** to call the kings and people of Judah back to him, virtually **pleading** with them.

In this **last** part of the last chapter of Isaiah that we will read for today's lesson, we find God looking to the **New** Testament period, noting that it is **now** time to bring into the Kingdom of God peoples of **all** nations. God also notes that, in contrast to the people of Judah, the peoples of other nations **will** respond to his call made by the **survivors** of the children of Israel, probably referring to the believers in the early New Testament church. And that some of these **new** believers of **other** nations will also become priests and Levites (in other words, **ministers** and **church workers**), echoing the statement made by St. Peter earlier in **1 Peter 2:9—But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**

To better understand the extent to which God is calling other nations, we need to look at the 5 groups of peoples mentioned in this text.

**Tarshish:** generally considered to be Southern Spain, but may refer to all of **Europe** and perhaps even nations west of Spain (meaning the **Americas**).

**Pul:** this may refer to Libya or the region between Egypt and Ethiopia, but could also refer to all of **Africa**.

**Lud:** generally considered to be **Asia Minor**, but some think it may be western Africa.

**Tubal:** generally considered to be the area of modern-day **Turkey**, but some include the area ranging between Albania and Georgia (**Russia**).

**Javan:** thought to be the region between **Great Britain and Greece**.

In other words, these terms may represent the **known world** at that time, therefore meaning “**all nations**.” God concludes his observations with a reference to the **new** heavens and the **new** earth, now free from any stain of sin.

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**Epistle Lesson: Hebrews 12: 4-24 (25-29)**

As we read today's lesson, it is important to note that the **12th** chapter of Hebrews follows the **11th** chapter. (*pause*) Perhaps obvious, but we need to remember that chapter 11—a portion of which was read two weeks ago—is a litany of the the **giants of the faith** during the Old Testament period—those who **believed and obeyed** God, some at the cost of their **lives**. So in chapter 12, the author of Hebrews asks us why **we** are complaining about **our** trials and tribulations in the light of the men and women of faith just discussed in chapter 11, who endured **without** complaining. He then likens **our** trials and tribulations to times of **discipline**, noting that if our **earthly** fathers disciplined us in order to make us better children, then certainly we should not be surprised that **God** uses trials and tribulations to discipline **us** so that our **behavior** will be more pleasing to him. That is to say, our parents, and God, discipline us because they **love** us.

He then gives us **examples** of things that we **should** and that we should **not** be doing as good children of God, and concludes with an admonition to have **respect** for God and what he is trying to do in and through us by contrasting two **scenes**: **one** is the time when the children of Israel gathered with Moses at the foot of **Mt. Sinai**, where God appeared as a blazing **fire, darkness, gloom, a tempest, blasts of a trumpet, and a voice** that caused the people to plead with Moses not to force them to continue to see and hear all this, because they were **petrified!** Instead, the author writes, we are standing before a scene that is even **more** awe inspiring, meaning that we have even **more** reason to **respect** God for who he is, what he has done, and what he is now doing. After all, God is going to do **more** shaking, but this time of both earth **and** the heavens.

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***Gospel Lesson: Luke 13: 22-30***

As Jesus continued his ministry while headed toward Jerusalem, someone asked him a question that prompts a **warning** from Jesus. The question was, how many will be **saved**? Jesus' answer was that only those **fully** committed to their faith—as demonstrated by their **actions**, and then only **if** they respond to the call when the call is given. Jesus then draws a picture of a **master** of a house closing the door on some who thought **they** were his children because they had previously shared a meal and been taught in his house (or, putting it in today's picture, people believing that they are saved simply because they **show up** in church on a regular basis, or at least 3 times a year, and come to the **Lord's Supper** on occasion). Jesus then implies that the **Jews** of that day were actually **evil doers** and would therefore be **excluded** from God's kingdom, instead **seeing** people from **other** nations, **despised** by the Jews, banqueting with God.

One cannot but help being reminded of Jesus' warning in his Sermon on the Mount: **Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Matthew 7:21.**

## Sunday on August 28 - September 3 (Proper 17)

### ***Old Testament Lesson: Proverbs 25: 2-10***

King Solomon, the author of Proverbs, was gifted by God with a special capability for ***discernment***, along with many other gifts. His father, King David, exhibited special gifts of ***discernment and wisdom***, especially as he interacted with King Saul, and as he interacted with the people of Judah as he continually had to flee from the murderous intent of King Saul. Solomon undoubtedly observed his father's human interactions as he grew up in the court, and he had ***plenty*** of opportunity to exercise discernment and wisdom as he built both the ***temple*** and the ***palace complex*** during his first 24 years as king.

In today's reading, Solomon advises on how ***people*** should ***respect*** and ***interact*** with governmental officials, and how governmental ***officials*** should interact with their people. To appreciate what he is saying, we might in our minds substitute "***president***" wherever he says "king." The emphasis, however, appears to be on our adopting an attitude of ***humility***, the same attitude that Christ exhibited (***Philippians 2:5-8***). In particular, the ***decision*** that a high government official makes should not be criticized on the basis of comments made in the media or internet, because they do not have access to ***all*** the data used in making that decision.

Consequently, Solomon cautions us about reporting to authorities what we ***think*** we saw as unlawful conduct—especially before we ascertain ***exactly*** what it was that we saw. The advice is reminiscent of the advice Jesus gave in ***Matthew 18*** when we want to accuse somebody of a sin.

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**Epistle Lesson: Hebrews 13: 1-17**

In previous Sundays, we read about the **heroes of faith** of the Old Testament period in chapter 11 of **Hebrews**, and in chapter 12 the **respect** that we should have for God as he disciplines us for our good. Here, in chapter 13, the author of **Hebrews** goes through a list of things that constitute **appropriate** behavior on our part and which also constitute a godly loving **attitude** on our part. That list includes the following:

- show **hospitality** to strangers
- remember those in **prison** (not only in word but in deed)
- honor your marriage by **not cheating** on your spouse, again in either **word** or **deed**
- beware of the love of **money**, but rather trusting only in God and being **content** with what you have
- honor and imitate your Christian **leaders**
- be a faithful **student** of the Bible, so that you can identify false teachings
- be prepared to **suffer** for your faith, just as Jesus did
- remember that we are **pilgrims** on earth, and that our **home** country is with God in heaven
- offer **praise** to God, no matter our circumstance
- share** what we have, even if at times it is sacrificial
- obey** your Christian leaders.

The theme again appears to be that of a **humble attitude**, being **grateful** to God for

- whatever** he has given you, materially or in circumstance
- your **spouse**, **honoring** him/her in word **and** deed
- your Christian **leaders**, obeying them and **imitating** their behavior and study of God's word

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***Gospel Lesson: Luke 14: 1-14***

Jesus addresses three issues in today's lesson. The first is whether it is **legal** to heal somebody on the Sabbath. The Pharisees had their own rules governing what or what **not** could be done on the Sabbath, and healing someone apparently was **not** on their list. Jesus quickly demonstrates that, as far as **God** is concerned, **compassion** trumps rules and laws, and then points out to the Pharisees that even **they** demonstrate more compassion to **animals** than they do to humans. Sound familiar?

Next Jesus reiterates the lesson from today's **Old Testament** lesson, that we need to show proper **respect** and **humility** in the presence of high-ranking government officials. In particular, we should not have an **inflated** view of **ourselves**.

Finally, Jesus advises that, as far as **God** is concerned, it is better to show compassion to those who **cannot** repay us in any way than to lavish our hospitality on those whom we can count on to **return** the favor. By blessing those who **cannot** return a blessing, we allow **God** to return the blessing instead. So Jesus is in fact advising us to be **practical** here. Which is the **better** deal: to have the poor, crippled, lame, or blind to somehow return a great favor, or to let God return that favor for them? Seriously, folks, we need to get **real!**