

Sunday on July 3 - 9 (Proper 9)

Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 66: 10-14

In Old Testament times, Jerusalem was known as “The City of Our God.” Well, that was true for ***awhile***, but slowly, with ups and downs, the kings of Judah led the people of Judah into ***apostasy***. As we learned two weeks ago, God sent ***Isaiah*** to the Southern Kingdom, hoping that they would ***repent*** of their rebellion against God. In today’s reading, God pictures Jerusalem, the place where he was ***dwelling***, as a ***mother*** providing comfort, nourishment, and peace to her child, in effect calling out to the citizens of Judah, “Come back to me so that I can ***bless*** you.” What God is saying, in effect, is that the people of Jerusalem, as well as those who love her, should ***rejoice*** in what God is ***offering*** to them: ***peace***, the ***glory*** of the nations, ***comfort***, ***prosperity***. Could God be speaking of His ***Messiah***? Could He be speaking to ***us*** today?

Epistle Lesson: Galatians 6: 1-10 and 14-18

As St. Paul continues his discussion from last week, he now turns to examples of how we can ***express*** our love to ***one another***. He first addresses the issue of when someone ***sins*** or makes a ***mistake***, and you are right there to ***correct*** him/her. St. Paul advises that you do it with ***gentleness***, because next time it may be ***you*** who will need the correction. And how will ***you*** respond to that correction?

Next, St. Paul addresses the issue of ***support*** (financial ***or otherwise***) for those who share the word of God. If we are ***stingy*** with our support because we spend it on ***our*** desires, God warns that we will ***reap*** what we sow. But then he also encourages us to continue to do ***good***, even though we are ***wearied*** from ***lack of support or recognition***; God does not want us to give up doing good because eventually ***he*** will provide and be our ***reward***. He then notes that it is especially important to do ***good*** for those in our ***household of faith***—those in our own ***church***.

Finally, St. Paul notes that he speaks from ***experience***, since the ***persecution*** that he has suffered for Christ has left its ***marks*** on his body just as the persecution that Christ suffered left marks on ***his*** body.

Gospel Lesson: Luke 10: 1-20

In chapter 9 of St. Luke's Gospel, we read that Jesus sent out his 12 ***apostles*** to cast out demons, heal diseases, and proclaim the kingdom of God. In our lesson for today, Jesus sends out 72 ***others*** with the ***same*** instructions—in preparation for Jesus who is to follow. After providing additional instructions on how to conduct themselves, Jesus sadly notes that many will ***reject*** their ministry, but in doing so, those who reject their message will receive ***greater*** punishment than the inhabitants of ***Sodom and Gomorrah***. Jesus then identifies cities in Israel that had already rejected his ministry, including Chorazin, Bethsaida, and even Jesus' home town Capernaum, and states flatly that they are doomed to ***hell***. The bottom line is that, since Jesus was sent by his ***Father***, those who reject whom ***Jesus*** has sent reject not only ***Jesus*** but also ***God the Father himself***.

The lesson ends with the ***joy*** that the 72 had as they returned from a very successful mission, noting that even ***demons*** were subject to them in Jesus' name. Recognizing the ***authority*** that Jesus had given to his followers, Jesus remarks that he saw Satan ***thrown*** out of heaven, probably indicating that with the completion of his mission, Satan would have no basis to appear in ***heaven*** to accuse the brethren (Revelation **12: 10**); and no power on ***earth*** to deal with the believer who resists him (see **James 4:7**). Nevertheless, Jesus says that, rather than rejoicing over demons being subject to a believer, the believer should rejoice in having their ***name*** written in heaven.

Sunday on July 10 - 16 (Proper 10)

As you all have probably surmised, the three lessons that are read each Sunday morning, generally have a **common theme**. You are all in for a **treat** today because, not only do we have an obvious common theme, we also get insight into God's very **nature**, a nature that he desires would be the characteristic of **every** person who calls himself/herself a Christian. So how does this all begin?

Old Testament Lesson: Leviticus (18: 1-5) 19: 9-18

Epistle lesson : Colossians 1: 1-14

Gospel Lesson: Luke 10: 25-37

Within **months** after leading the Children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt, Moses found himself facing God on **Mt. Sinai** in Arabia, where God gave to the Jews the Ten Commandments. But to ensure that **everyone** understood the meaning of the **Ten Commandments** (sometimes referred to as "**The Law**," or as "**Moses' Teachings**"), God gave hundreds of examples of what one **should** or should **not** do. Have you ever thought about **why** God found it necessary to do this? (*pause*) The Children of Israel had just been taken out of an abusive slavery in Egypt, where they were taken **advantage of** at every opportunity. It would not be surprising to find that the Jews found this to be a **normal** way of life. But this was not **God's** idea of an appropriate and pleasing way of life. So laws had to be laid down on **how** they interacted with others.

For example, in the first part of the Old Testament Lesson, God makes it clear that an owner does not reap his fields to the very **corners**, or gather up anything that has **dropped**. We see the value of this idea in the Book of **Ruth**. You remember this story: Naomi and her husband Elimelech migrate to Moab to escape a **drought**, where their two sons marry Moabite women. Then Elimelech dies, and shortly thereafter the two sons die. Since Naomi was not eligible for **Social Security** benefits yet, and **life insurance** had not been available, the three widows are left **destitute**. Ruth decides to accompany Naomi back to Judah at the end of the drought, where she **sustains** their lives by gleaning grain during the harvest. Thus the value of **God's** wisdom.

Then God notes that we should never try to get revenge, because that is **His** prerogative (**Romans 12: 17-21**). And God emphasizes that we should not even hold a **grudge** against someone (see also **James 5:9**). Why? God concludes this section of the Old Testament lesson with the words, “. . . you shall love your neighbor as **yourself**.” But what does **love** have to do with **laws and rules**? That is illustrated in the **Gospel** Lesson, where we find that the Law states that we will inherit eternal life **if** we love our neighbor as ourself. Furthermore, in our **Epistle** Lesson, St. Paul compliments the Colossians for demonstrating their faith **through** their love. But all of this becomes **most** clear when we remember St. Paul’s words to the **Romans (13:9-10)**, where he states,

“For the **commandments** . . . are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ **Love does no wrong to a neighbor**; therefore **love** is the fulfilling of the **Law**.”

This thought is incorporated into Jesus’s response to an expert in the law who challenged Jesus with the question, “Which is the great **commandment** in the Law?” Jesus said, “**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.**” (**Matt. 22:34-40**) In other words, the **entire** Old Testament is an illustration of these two commandments, and how they are or are not observed.

What a **different perspective** of the Ten Commandments! So today’s lessons can be summarized by two words:

“love” and “compassion”

Sunday on July 24 - 30 (Proper 12)

Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 18: (17-19) 20-33

Today's Old Testament Lesson continues the story of last week, where we find the Lord and two angels—seeming to be three men—arriving at Abraham's tent while on their way to Sodom and Gomorrah. Following Middle Eastern custom, Abraham has extended to them his best ***hospitality*** by means of water to wash their feet, a shade tree, and a sumptuous banquet. As the three men ***leave*** for Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham ***tags along*** for awhile to be sure that they are headed in the right direction. It is then that the ***Lord*** decides to ***reveal*** to Abraham what his intent is. Abraham ***immediately*** recognizes with whom he is now talking, and also realizes what the consequences will be for his ***nephew, Lot***, and his family, who are living there. And so Abraham begins to ***intercede*** by appealing to God's mercy ***not*** to destroy the ***righteous*** with the wicked. Little did Abraham know that ***Lot***—at the same time—was interceding for the people among whom he lived:

. . . and if he (the Lord) rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard) . . . 2 Peter 2:7-8

It would appear, then, that the lesson for ***today*** is that believers should be aware of their ***environment***, looking for opportunities to intercede for their ***nation*** as well as ***other*** believers.

Epistle Lesson: Colossians 2: 6-15 (16-19)

As St. Paul continues his letter to the ***Colossians***, we find him encouraging the believers to be ***firmly*** rooted in the ***faith***, warning them that the ***world*** would ***love*** to corrupt their understanding of the faith through ***politically correct thinking and tolerance***. But then he explains the ***significance*** of two covenant acts: circumcision in the Old Testament, and baptism in the New Testament era. ***Circumcision*** is not just a removal of flesh, but a sign of the removal of the ***Old Nature***. And in the New Testament era, ***water baptism*** is the process by which

this circumcision takes place. Baptism spiritually **buries** us with Christ and then **raises** us from the dead with Christ. At the same time, God **forgives** us all our sins and wipes our record of sin (debt) **clean** by nailing them to Christ's cross. Meaning that Christ bore **our** sins on the tree as well. Consequently, Christ has triumphed over **Satan** and his **cohorts** ("rulers and authorities") for all time.

Then St. Paul clarifies the significance of some of the laws, rules, and procedures that characterized the **Old Testament** spiritual life, including **passing** on certain foods and drinks, or **celebrating** festivals or new moons, or **denying** oneself earthly needs or pleasures, or **worshipping** of angels, or **claiming** to have had certain visions. These now appeal to a **sensuous** mind but no longer are a part of one's life in **Christ**. The former things were only a **shadow** of that which was to come; once the real thing has come, the shadow has **no** significance.

Gospel Lesson: Luke 11: 1-13

Today's reading finds Jesus **praying**. And when he finishes, one of his disciples asks him to teach **them** how to pray. This may come as a surprise to us, since most of **us** assume that everybody who frequents a church knows how to pray. But the disciples are not talking about reading the prayers in the **hymnal** or the **bulletin**. They are talking about having a heart-to-heart talk with God himself. So Jesus takes advantage of this request to teach his disciples how to pray. The Lord's Prayer is a prayer that can be used anytime, anywhere, because it covers in a **general** sense the things that we need to pray for. But then Jesus goes on to illustrate that God is even more interested in our **specific** needs—whether physical or spiritual—than any **earthly** being might be. He concludes this discussion by encouraging **all** believers to ask the Father to give the **Holy Spirit** to them. The lesson here being that we, as a congregation, among **other** things, could be interceding for our **pastor**, that God would pour out his Holy Spirit on **him** as he prepares to lead the congregation in worship. And also pray for the **congregation**, that it would have open minds and open hearts.