

Hear what the Spirit is saying

Sunday Morning at St. Hugh's in Idyllwild, California

August 30, 2020 | Pentecost +13

Collect for Proper 17

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. **Amen.**

~BCP 233

Jeremiah 15:15-21 NRSV

In this first reading Jeremiah complains to the Lord about the pain and difficulties of his mission. He then receives God's answer.

¹⁵ O Lord, you know; remember me and visit me, and bring down retribution for me on my persecutors. In your forbearance do not take me away; know that on your account I suffer insult. ¹⁶ Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts. ¹⁷ I did not sit in the company of merrymakers, nor did I rejoice; under the weight of your hand I sat alone, for you had filled me with indignation. ¹⁸ Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Truly, you are to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail. ¹⁹ Therefore thus says the Lord: If you turn back, I will take you back, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall serve as my mouth. It is they who will turn to you, not you who will turn to them. ²⁰ And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, says the Lord. ²¹ I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.

Romans 12:9-21 NRSV

In this lesson Paul exhorts the disciples in Rome to live lives full of Christian dedication and virtue, overcoming evil with good.

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with

those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Matthew 16:21-28 NRSV

In the gospel reading Jesus teaches Peter and the other disciples that the way of his ministry and theirs is the way of the cross.

²¹ From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." ²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?:"

²⁷ "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. ²⁸ Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Psalm 26:1-8 BCP 616

The Psalm Response is a plea for justice by one who serves the Lord well.

- 1 Give judgment for me, O Lord, for I have lived with integrity; *
I have trusted in the Lord and have not faltered.
- 2 Test me, O Lord, and try me; *
examine my heart and my mind.
- 3 For your love is before my eyes; *
I have walked faithfully with you.
- 4 I have not sat with the worthless, *
nor do I consort with the deceitful.

- 5 I have hated the company of evildoers; *
I will not sit down with the wicked.
- 6 I will wash my hands in innocence, O Lord, *
that I may go in procession round your altar,
- 7 Singing aloud a song of thanksgiving *
and recounting all your wonderful deeds.
- 8 Lord, I love the house in which you dwell *
and the place where your glory abides.

August 30, 2020 | Pentecost+13
SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.

Romans 12:15-16



Definitions

- **Christology.** The theological study of the person and deeds of Jesus.
- **Ecclesiology.** The branch of theology that is concerned with the nature, constitution, and functions of a church.
- **Soteriology.** The branch of theology dealing with the nature and means of salvation.
- **Eschatology.** The branch of theology that is concerned with the end of the world or of humankind.
- **Ethics.** A set of principles of right conduct.

Commentary on Romans 12:9-21. A homiletical perspective.

By David Bartlett, Professor of New Testament, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia

The first rule of preaching on a text from Paul is to decide what part of the text should serve as the sermon's focus. Paul may have been able to pack Christology, ecclesiology, soteriology, eschatology, and ethics into one paragraph—but woe to the preacher who tries to pack all of that into one sermon.

Romans 12 is especially full. Paul has spent eleven chapters assuring the Romans that God's justifying grace is extended to Jews and Gentiles alike.

Now with Romans 12:1 begins the great “Therefore.” Here are the implications of God’s grace for the way in which we live our lives, as individuals and as communities of faith.

The injunctions simply pour forth. In the text for this Sunday a minimalist count discovers twenty-three separate imperatives. Even the most enthusiastic advocate of *lectio continua* would probably not dare spend twenty-three Sundays discussing the implications of Paul’s imprecations. Here are some suggestions for focusing the sermon.

First, notice that all these injunctions are presented in the service of right worship. Romans 12:1 is the topic sentence for the chapters that follow.

“Therefore ... present your bodies as a living sacrifice ... which is your spiritual [or “reasonable”] worship.” Our verses provide concrete applications of the call to right worship. In a time when we love the term “spirituality,” we note that for Paul right worship is both “reasonable” and “bodily.” Right worship is intellectually reflective and practically active.

One way to preach the text would be to look at a few of Paul’s instructions and see the way in which they encourage ethical perspicacity and compassionate energy. “Hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good” (v. 9). Much as we might wish that the distinctions between evil and good were immediately and intuitively clear, we know that this is a call to us as individuals and as church communities to think together about the complicated ways in which good and evil are at work among us.

Then a few verses later Paul gives a closely related example of how we worship bodily, actively: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil.... if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink” (vv. 17, 20). This is a tough injunction when we are dealing with enemies close at hand—that annoying person in the neighborhood, that recalcitrant elder at church. It is even harder to help the congregation think about how we embody love for the enemy when our whole political system seems to depend on identifying those whom we should fear and even those whom we should hate. What on earth would it mean to feed the Taliban or give Al-Qaeda something to drink? When can Christians think of public policy not just as prudential self-protection but as an expression of what we owe God—right worship?

Second, it would be possible to present Paul’s commands as a way of fleshing out Christ’s call in the Gospel text for today. In contrast to the purveyors of the “gospel” who tell us that God is in the business of handing out material rewards for our faithfulness, in Matthew Jesus reminds us: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). There is an honorable tradition of asceticism as Christian discipline: giving up the

self in poverty and chastity. There is also an honorable tradition of giving up the self and taking on the cross in the concrete actions of the everyday world.

Paul's instructions give us guidance for that kind of daily self-sacrifice: "Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are" (v. 16). This is a model for a cross-shaped life and also for a cross-shaped church. In our churches there is a temptation to let the social structures of the larger world shape the social structures of the community. Notice how the welcome of new members in the service or in the church bulletin dwells in greater length on our delight in having the pillars of the community than on our delight in welcoming those who are barely making it. In your sermon, help your congregation think about the ways in which your church elections and church social events encourage or discourage that kind of harmony. Church fundraising dinners at the country club send a signal; the excited whispering when the president of the university shows up for worship sends a signal too.

A third option for a sermon would be to reflect on the complicated injunctions about the enemy in Romans 12:19–21. In part, Paul's instructions are theocentric and eschatological. The reason we do not show our wrath is that wrath is God's business. The reason we do not work vengeance now is that vengeance will come in its own good time. This kind of deeply theological advice can sound not very nice in a world and a church often loudly in favor of niceness. Yet Paul's claim helps deliver us from the dilemma of saying that we are not to be vengeful because nothing really matters; after all, all of us mess up from time to time, so why pick on that particularly egregious offender? Our willingness to avoid vengeance is partly our trust that God is God, and if justice is due, justice will be done. God will overcome.

On the other hand, and practically in the same breath, Paul talks about our own overcoming of evil with good. Surely this was part of the deeply faithful strategies of Mohandas Gandhi and of the American civil rights movement. Positive nonresistance is not acquiescence; it is struggle on terms that we do not let the opposition define. We will overcome.

Of course we are still left puzzling over how it might be that being kind to our enemies "heaps burning coals on their heads" (v. 20). Perhaps the congregation will not notice when we leave the exposition of that verse out of the sermon. If they ask why we avoid that tricky text, we can quote the other verse that best explains our strategy: "Do not claim to be wiser than you are" (v. 16).

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year A, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 4 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).