

# HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT IS SAYING

In Scripture and Prayer and The Great Cloud of Witnesses

Week of August 28, 2022

*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

## **Sirach 10:12-18** NRSVue, 2021

*Our opening lesson is a condemnation of human pride, warning that the Lord pulls down the mighty and puts the humble in their place. The root of pride is in the sin of a human refusal to recognize dependence on God. Individuals, especially rulers, and nations that are arrogant will be brought to destruction. (These judgments are part of a collection of proverbs and wisdom sayings composed about two centuries before the time of Christ and included in the Apocrypha.)*

<sup>12</sup> The beginning of human pride is to forsake the Lord; the heart has withdrawn from its Maker. <sup>13</sup> For the beginning of pride is sin, and the one who clings to it pours out abominations. Therefore the Lord brought upon them unheard-of calamities and destroyed them completely. <sup>14</sup> The Lord overthrew the thrones of rulers and enthroned the lowly in their place. <sup>15</sup> The Lord plucked up the roots of the nations and planted the humble in their place. <sup>16</sup> The Lord laid waste the lands of the nations and destroyed them to the foundations of the earth. <sup>17</sup> He removed some of them and destroyed them and erased the memory of them from the earth. <sup>18</sup> Pride was not created for human beings or violent anger for those born of women.

## **Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16** NRSVue, 2021

*In this reading Christians are urged to live moral, hospitable, and charitable lives, recalling the faith and examples of their leaders, but especially the unchanging Jesus. The leaders referred to are the founders of this church who have now died. Jesus Christ, however, remains with his people, in the past, present, and future. Scripture says that God will never forsake us, and, with the Lord as our helper, there is no need to be afraid. Therefore one should be swift to worship, both in the praise of one's lips and by sharing and striving to do good to others.*

<sup>1</sup> Let mutual affection continue. <sup>2</sup> Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. <sup>3</sup> Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them, those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. <sup>4</sup> Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. <sup>5</sup> Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he himself has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

## 2

<sup>6</sup> So we can say with confidence,

“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.  
What can anyone do to me?”

<sup>7</sup> Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. <sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

<sup>15</sup> Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. <sup>16</sup> Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

### **Luke 13:10-17** NRSVue, 2021

*In the gospel Jesus tells a parable about humility and teaches his host that he should invite the poor and infirm to his feasts. Both the parable and the teaching have a still deeper significance. The reign of God is the Lord's gift, which comes to those who do not presume their place in it. By his actions as well as his words Jesus' ministry shows that the kingdom is open to those who are considered by others to be outcasts. People who share in God's ruling love and justice are to have a transformed attitude toward the poor and needy.*

<sup>1</sup> On one occasion when Jesus[a] was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely.

<sup>7</sup> When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. <sup>8</sup> “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host, <sup>9</sup> and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. <sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. <sup>11</sup> For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

<sup>12</sup> He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers and sisters or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. <sup>13</sup> But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. <sup>14</sup> And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”



## Psalm 112 BCP 755

*Blessed are those who are right with the Lord, who revere God and are just and generous to those in need.*

- 1 Hallelujah! Happy are they who fear the Lord \*  
and have great delight in his commandments!
- 2 Their descendants will be mighty in the land; \*  
the generation of the upright will be blessed.
- 3 Wealth and riches will be in their house, \*  
and their righteousness will last for ever.
- 4 Light shines in the darkness for the upright; \*  
the righteous are merciful and full of compassion.
- 5 It is good for them to be generous in lending \*  
and to manage their affairs with justice.
- 6 For they will never be shaken; \*  
the righteous will be kept in everlasting remembrance.
- 7 They will not be afraid of any evil rumors; \*  
their heart is right; they put their trust in the Lord.
- 8 Their heart is established and will not shrink, \*  
until they see their desire upon their enemies.
- 9 They have given freely to the poor, \*  
and their righteousness stands fast for ever;  
they will hold up their head with honor.
- 10 The wicked will see it and be angry;  
they will gnash their teeth and pine away; \*  
the desires of the wicked will perish.

## Supplemental Resources

### Commentary on Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

*By Amy L.B. Wheeler, Associate Professor of New Testament Wheaton College  
Wheaton, IL*

Hebrews 13 can read like a list of rules — do this and don't do that — but it also includes some vital and enduring theological truths.

The instructions and the grounds for those instructions combine to create a template for ethics, a picture of how this community might live until they finish the race of faith ([Hebrews 12:1](#)) and enter God's heavenly city ([Hebrews 12:22-24](#)).

## 4

### Life

At the close of chapter 12, the author left his audience with the intense quote from Deuteronomy, “Our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). He must have taken a deep breath there, or maybe even resumed his sermon series the next week, for the beginning of chapter 13 switches tone abruptly. He issues six basic instructions for those who are members of Christ ([Hebrews 3:1,14](#)).

First, they should love their brothers and sisters. The early Christian movement practiced “fictive kinship.” In both language and lifestyle, they treated one another like family. The author of Hebrews has used this practice throughout the letter referring to them as siblings ([Hebrews 1:1; 2:11-12, 16, 17; 3:1, 12](#); Hebrews [8:11; 10:19; 13:22-23](#)) and urging them to continue in supportive relationships ([Hebrews 3:13; 10:25, 32-34](#)). Here he only reiterates what he has urged before: keep loving one another.

Second, they should not become an insular community focused only on themselves. They can’t forget to love the stranger as well. Who knows? They might end up entertaining an angel who has been sent to serve humanity ([Hebrews 1:14](#)) just as Abraham did ([Genesis 18:2, 16; 19:1, 15-16](#)).

Third, they have an intimate responsibility to remember those who are in prison and those who are being mistreated. The author noted that they faced persecution in the past ([Hebrews 10:32-34](#)) and are currently struggling against sin, which could also include an element of external persecution ([Hebrews 12:2](#)). The prisons of the first-century Roman world were daunting places. Crowded, dark rooms where prisoners were often bound and abused, these prisons necessitated that family and friends provide goods and visits to those in chains. They are all part of the same body, so the congregation should serve those suffering just as if they were going through the same horrors.

Fourth, with little fanfare or explanation, the author asserted that marriage should be honored and sexuality in marriage should be undefiled. God will judge those who commit adultery and fornication. It is a striking reminder of the gap in time and culture that these issues receive such little treatment. Hence, modern interpreters are left to try to ascertain the scope and application of such a blanket term as pornos (sexually immoral person). Nevertheless, exclusive purity of the marriage relationship remains his clear instruction.

Fifth, a place should exist in their lives for contentment, literally an “anti-love of money” (*aphilarguros*). They should acknowledge that what they have is sufficient. Scholars know that ancient house churches consisted of a few wealthy and quite a few not-so-wealthy, but here the emphasis lies in

an acceptance of what God has provided for them. A lack of gratitude or a grasping for more wealth should not color their lives.

Sixth, and finally, he urges them to remember their leaders. These could have been direct witnesses to Jesus, who heard from him the gospel ([Hebrews 2:3](#)) and then spoke it to this congregation ([Hebrews 13:7](#)). They must not be with them anymore, for the author asks his listeners to set before them the way in which these people ended their life. They endured until the end, just as he is hoping the listeners will do. They are part of this great cloud of witnesses ([Hebrews 12:1](#)) and their faith should be imitated.

## Theology

Toward the end of these instructions the author makes three theological comments, two from the Scriptures of Israel, and one about Jesus Christ. They provide a rationale for both the immediate instruction, but also a foundation for his entire letter.

After he warns them about covetousness and dissatisfaction, he reminds them that God has said, “I will never leave you nor will I forsake you.” There is no need to worry about material goods if you have the presence and protection of God. The citation echoes [Deuteronomy 31](#), where Moses promises the people and Joshua who are poised to enter the land of Canaan that God will protect them. On a broader level, then, this quote is not just about finances, but about promise of God to sustain. Since they are following a new Joshua (in Greek Jesus and Joshua is the same name, *Iesous*) to a heavenly land of promise, they need this assurance from God as much as the Israelites did.

The second citation is their response. For the first time in the letter that includes numerous Scripture citations the audience is given a voice. Knowing God’s faithfulness to those who are listening, they can respond courageously with words from [Psalm 117](#). Since the Lord helps them (cf. [Hebrews 4:16](#)), they need not fear anything that another human could do to them. If they were fearing future persecution, especially more seizure of their property ([Hebrews 10:34](#)), knowing that God would provide for them and help them would allow them to withstand anything, even as their forebears had done ([11:35b–39](#)). Thinking about persecution in the future and in the past might have led the author to his next comment about the earlier generation of leaders and their lifelong faithfulness. If they showed consistency in their lives, Jesus’ consistency is even greater. He has been the same yesterday, today, and forever.

This rich statement could stand on its own and at least one copyist was so moved by it, he added an “amen” at the close of this verse. Again, it could simply be a comfort that even though good leaders of the past have

## 6

died, their leader Jesus will remain forever. On a deeper level, though, this statement adds further support for this author's high view of Jesus. He is the Son of God, and that does not only indicate that he is Israel's Messianic King, but that he is truly divine. If he exists in the same way from eternity past to eternity future, such a statement can only be said about God.

### A theological life

After the author reflects again about the power of Jesus' sacrifice ([Hebrews 13:9-14](#)), he instructs the audience to offer sacrifices of their own: praise, good deeds, and fellowship. By this point of the letter, they know who God is and what God has done on their behalf. They also know specific ways they should live, but the image of a sacrifice through all times ([Hebrews 13:15](#)) captures the ongoing application of Christian theology in Christian life. Praising God, doing good, and caring, in other words, a right relationship with God, self, and others will please the God who will sustain them forever.

On Working Preacher; [posted August 28, 2016](#) and accessed August 27, 2022

## THE WISDOM OF BEN SIRA (ECCLESIASTICUS)

The Wisdom of Ben Sira derives its title from the author, "Yeshua [Jesus], son of Eleazar, son of Sira" ([50:27](#)). This seems to be the earliest title of the book. The designation "*Liber Ecclesiasticus*," meaning "Church Book," appended to some Greek and Latin manuscripts, is perhaps due to the extensive use the church made of this book in presenting moral teaching to catechumens and to the faithful. The title "Sirach" comes from the Greek form of the author's name.

The author, a sage who lived in Jerusalem, was thoroughly imbued with love for the wisdom tradition, and also for the law, priesthood, Temple, and divine worship. As a wise and experienced observer of life he addressed himself to his contemporaries with the motive of helping them to maintain religious faith and integrity through study of the books sacred to the Jewish tradition.

The book contains numerous well-crafted maxims, grouped by affinity, and dealing with a variety of subjects such as the individual, the family, and the community in their relations with one another and with God. It treats of friendship, education, poverty and wealth, laws, religious worship, and many other matters that reflect the religious and social customs of the time.

Written in Hebrew in the early years of the second century B.C., the book was finished by ca. 175. The text was translated into Greek by the author's

grandson after 117 B.C. He also wrote a foreword which contains valuable information about the book, its author, and himself as translator. Until the close of the nineteenth century the Wisdom of Ben Sira was known to Christians in translations, of which the Greek rendering was the most important. From it the Latin version was made. Between 1896 and 1900, again in 1931, and several times since 1956, incomplete manuscripts were discovered, so that more than two thirds of the book in Hebrew is available; these Hebrew texts agree substantially with the Greek. One such text, from Masada, is pre-Christian in date. The New American Bible provides a critical translation based on the evidence of all the ancient texts.

Though not included in the Jewish Bible after the first century A.D., nor, therefore, accepted by Protestants, the Wisdom of Ben Sira has been recognized by the Catholic Church as inspired and canonical. The Foreword, though not properly part of the book, is always included with it because of its antiquity and importance.

The contents of the Wisdom of Ben Sira are of a discursive nature, not easily divided into separate parts. Chapters 1–43 deal largely with moral instruction; 44:1–50:24 contain a eulogy of the heroes of Israel. There are two appendixes in which the author expresses his gratitude to God (51:1–12), and invites the unschooled to acquire true wisdom (51:13–30).

“The Wisdom of Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus)” in  
*The New American Bible Revised Edition*

## Alternate translations of Sirach 10:12

(1611) **KJV with Apocrypha:** The beginning of pride is when one departeth from God, and his heart is turned away from his Maker.

(2021) **NRSVue:** The beginning of human pride is to forsake the Lord; the heart has withdrawn from its Maker.

(1985) **New Jerusalem Bible:** The first stage of pride is to desert the Lord and to turn one’s heart away from one’s Maker.

(2011) **New American Bible Revised Edition:** The beginning of pride is stubbornness in withdrawing the heart from one’s Maker.

(2011) **Common English Bible:** Human arrogance begins when people rebel against the Lord, and their hearts rebel against the one who made them.

(1996) **Revised English Bible:** The beginning of pride is to forsake the Lord, when the human heart revolts against its Maker;

**Question:** *Which translation best reveals the wisdom of the Holy Spirit/human author to you? Why?*

# A PAGE FOR NOTES

# Spiritual Day Hike

In the landscape where Spirit & World intersect



Week of August 21, 2022

## This Week's Holy Women and Men (Witnesses to inspire us)

*Commemorations in the Episcopal Church are listed in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), in Lesser Feasts and Fasts (LFF), and in a Great Cloud of Witnesses (GCoW).*

*Here are the Holy Women and Men remembered this week:*

- Aug 28.....[Augustine of Hippo](#), Bishop and Theologian, 430 *LFF*
- Aug 28.....[Moses the Black](#), Desert Father and Martyr, c. 400 *GCoW*
- Aug 29.....[Beheading of John the Baptist](#) *LFF (Information on the Orthodox Wiki)*
- Aug 29.....[John Bunyan](#), Writer, 1688 *GCoW*
- Aug 30.....Margaret Ward, 1588, Margaret Clitherow, 1586, and Anne Line, 1601, Martyrs, *LFF*
- Aug 30.....[Charles Grafton](#), Bishop and Ecumenist, 1912 *GCoW*
- Aug 31.....[David Pendleton Oakerhater](#), Deacon, 1931 *LFF (Sep 1 in GCoW)*
- Sep 2.....[Martyrs of New Guniea](#), 1942 *LFF*
- Sep 3.....[Phoebe](#), Deacon *LFF (On Wikipedia)*
- Sep 3.....[Prudence Crandall](#), Teacher & Prophetic Witness, 1890 *GCoW*

## August 28: Moses the Black, Desert Father & Martyr, c, 400

Moses of Ethiopia, sometimes called Moses the Black, was a fifth century monk who lived in one of several isolated desert monasteries near Scete in Lower Egypt. He was described as being tall, strong, “black of body,” and in his early life, the hot-blooded leader of a marauding robber band.

Little is known of his actual life, but an imaginative collection of religious legends has accumulated about him. Such tales point to the deep struggles of a Christian soul seeking salvation in difficult settings. Moses was portrayed as a person of excesses, a slave who was both a thief and a murderer, a perennial fornicator who, after he became a monk, still struggled for several years with sexual fantasies. To rid himself of sexual temptation, he reportedly stood all night in his cell with his eyes open. This struggle endured for seven years, after which the temptations went away.

He led an ascetic life, lived in a simple cell, and ate only ten ounces of dry bread each day. Once, when the monks gathered to judge a member who had sinned, Brother Moses arrived carrying a leaky basket filled with sand on his back. He explained that what he was holding behind him represented his own many sins, now hidden from his own view. “And now I have come to judge my brother for a small fault,” he remarked. The other monks then each personally forgave their erring brother and returned to their cells.

## Day Hike -2

Moses was not ordained until late in life; also in his later years, he founded his own monastery. At about age 75, he was warned that an armed band of raiders was approaching to slay him. "They who live by the sword shall die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52), the former robber-murderer calmly replied. He and six other brothers waited patiently, and were slain, after which, according to the monastic account St. Moses the Ethiopian, seven crowns descended from heaven over the place where they were martyred.

*A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018*

## August 29: Beheading of Saint John the Baptist

All four Gospels give an account of John the Baptist as a prophet and preacher whose ministry created expectation and awakened a wave of repentance leading to baptism among many different groups of people. Two Sundays in Advent focus on that preaching and the First Sunday after the Epiphany celebrates Jesus' baptism by John as a central moment where the fullness of Christ's humanity and divinity are revealed. In Mark's Gospel, John's arrest is the moment when Jesus begins his public ministry. John's death likewise has a profound impact the narrative in the Gospels.

Herod, who regarded John with the apprehension of a tyrant for a leader among the people and with the superstitious dread of the wicked for true spiritual power, let himself be cornered into condemning John to death. The Gospel recounts the sordid tale of a young woman's manipulation and the foolish promise that Herod makes. Caught by his own rash promise and pride, Herod has the man he fears put to death and his head delivered on a platter to the girl, who takes it to her mother, Herodias. The gruesome narrative ends, as John's disciples take his body and bury it and then go to Jesus to tell him what has happened.

After the death of John the Baptist, Jesus, with his disciples withdraws from the crowds, but they follow. No doubt the unjust execution of a fierce and admired prophet left many in fear, anger, and confusion. That day's teaching led to the Feeding of the Five Thousand and soon thereafter to the Transfiguration, Peter's Confession, and the First Prediction of the Passion. As John's ministry had been integral to the beginning of Jesus' ministry, John's death was part of the turning point as the narratives turn towards Jerusalem and the cross.

John's role as the one who points towards Jesus and who baptizes him, the family connections that Luke's birth narratives relates, and the role that John plays in the spiritual life of the people gives weight to his death which, like his preaching, foreshadowed Jesus' ministry and his death. 437

This feast, along with the Feast of the Nativity of St John the Baptist, found its place in the church's calendar very early.

*Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 2018*

## August 30: Margaret Ward, 1588, Margaret Clitherow, 1586, and Anne Line, 1601, Martyrs

To their credit, our sixteenth century ancestors perceived a vital connection between politics, religion, and morality; to their shame both Catholics and Protestants pursued the righteousness of Christ with the sword. Despite her pacific disposition and refusal to “make windows into men’s souls,” many Roman Catholics were persecuted as traitors by Anglican magistrates during the reign of Elizabeth I. Margaret Ward, Margaret Clitherow and Anne Line, along with the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales canonized by Paul VI in 1970, fell victims to this Anti-Catholic violence. Though we rightly celebrate the flourishing of Anglicanism in the reign of Elizabeth, we must repent of zeal without knowledge and unjust violence.

Nothing is known of the early life of Margaret Ward, the Pearl of Tyburn. She helped a Roman Catholic priest, William (or Richard) Watson to escape from Bridewell Prison. Discovered and arrested, Ward was questioned, kept in irons for eight days, hanged by the wrists and scourged; nevertheless, she refused to disclose the whereabouts of Watson. Liberty was offered if she would worship at an Anglican service and beseech pardon of the Queen. Refusing, Ward was executed by hanging on August 30th, 1588.

Margaret Clitherow, called the Pearl of York, converted to the Roman Catholic faith. Her husband, whose brother was a Roman Catholic priest, remained in the Church of England. He paid the fines levied for his wife’s lack of attendance at church and allowed her to harbor priests in their home, an offense punishable by death. Discovered and arrested, Clitherow refused to plea, sparing her children from testifying against their mother. To induce a plea, weights were placed on a board until she was crushed. Clitherow died on Good Friday 1586, which coincided with the Annunciation that year. Hearing of her cruel death, Elizabeth wrote to the people of York to protest the execution of a woman.

Anne Line and her brother were converts to the Roman faith disinherited by their Puritan father. Born Alice Higham, she took the name Anne after her conversion, and was married to Roger Line, who was also a disinherited convert. After her husband’s death, Anne was entrusted to keep a house of refuge for fugitive priests by the Jesuit missionary-priest John Gerard. On Candlemas 1601, during the blessing of the candles, her house was raided. At her trial, Line told the court she only regretted not being able to harbor a thousand more priests. She was executed by hanging on February 27th.

*Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 2018*

## Day Hike –4

### September 2: The Martyrs of New Guinea, 1942

New Guinea, the second largest island in the world, is still one of the main frontiers of Christian mission, because of its difficult terrain and the cultural diversity of its peoples, who speak some 500 distinct languages. Christian missionaries first began work there in the 1860s and 1870s, with only limited success. The Anglican mission began in 1891, and the first bishop was consecrated in 1898.

During World War II, the suffering of both the native people and the missionaries was severe. One historian reckons that the total number of martyrs from all Christian denominations during this period was around 330. This feast day, observed in the Diocese of New Guinea and in many dioceses of the Church of Australia, marks the witness of nine Australian missionaries and two Papuan martyrs who died while serving those who needed them.

The missionaries were determined to remain with their people during the Japanese invasion and to continue their work of healing, teaching, and evangelism. Once the invasion occurred, however, they realized that their presence was a danger to the local people with whom they stayed; any people of European descent were considered enemy combatants and villages harboring them were severely punished. Two of the missionaries, one Australian and one Papuan, were evacuating with the villagers when their boat was strafed and sunk by sea-planes. The remaining missionaries were captured in the bush. Some were executed by soldiers, and others by locals who feared retribution for their presence.

One of the Papuan martyrs, Lucian Tapiedi, is among the ten 20th century martyrs honored with a statue above the west door of Westminster Abbey in London. While accompanying his Australian companions as a guide, he was separated from the group and killed by a local Orokaiva named Hivijapa. After the war, Hivijapa converted to Christianity, was baptized as Hivijapa Lucian, and built a church at Embi in memory of the evangelist whom he had slain.

In 1950, the Primate of the Anglican Church in Japan gave several bamboo crosses to be erected at the parish churches of the martyrs as a mark of contrition. In addition to remembering those who gave up their lives, the day also includes remembrance of the faith and devotion of Papuan Christians of all churches, who risked their own lives to care for the wounded, and to save the lives of many who otherwise would have perished.

*Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 2018*

