

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People
14th Sunday after Pentecost – Year C

RCL Readings – Jeremiah 4:11-12,22-28; Psalm 14; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10

ACNA Readings – Exodus 32:1, 7-14; Psalm 51:1-17; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10

Introduction. In the 1950s, Rabbi Dr Abraham Heschel published a seminal work on Jewish philosophy titled *God in Search of Man*. Heschel argued that God always seeks a partnership with humans in caring for and restoring the creation. Interestingly he argues that it is when humans have lost their way that they are most open to being found by God. I wonder if Rabbi Heschel had been influenced by the parable of the lost sheep and the coins in Luke 15 in any way?

Common Theme. This week's readings show us again that God the creator is intimately interested in his creation. God is indeed in search of Man, especially those that have lost their way. There are consequences for disobedience, which is reflected in the looming judgement in Jeremiah, but there is also compassion and mercy available for the repentant in the Epistle and the Gospel.

Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28. A prevailing theme in the Prophets is impending judgement on the nations or on the sinful nation of Israel in particular. Here Jeremiah uses the image of a strong, dry, and desolate wind that will bring devastation on the people of Israel. The prophet describes the people as foolish, not because they lack intellectual wisdom but because they have no living relationship with their God. They have lost their way. Instead of obedience to the instructions of the Lord, they practice deeds of evil. These undefined deeds of evil are compared to the emptiness of creation in which, prior to God's creative intervention, everything was chaos and darkness. Their deeds achieve nothing and the people have no intimate knowledge of the Lord. These kinds of warnings should not be relegated solely to the Jewish people or thought of as the "Old Testament God of doom" that no longer applies post-resurrection. Hebrews reminds us that the Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever. When the Church loses her way, there will be consequences. To think otherwise is foolish. We all reap what we sow (Gal 6:6-8). Despite Jeremiah proclaiming a bleak future, the Lord says he will not make a full end to the people or the Land. There is always hope, always mercy and always repentance.

Psalm 14. Here we have another depiction of the foolish. David describes the fool who has lost his way as a person who denies the existence of God. Saying there is no God is rebellion, and not just rebellion rooted in intellect or science. David writes that a fool says in his heart there is no God, so atheism is rebellion rooted in the heart.

The result of atheism is not a more just and ordered world. History can confirm that secular societies have not produced tolerant realms of justice and peace. The result of denying God is a corrupt society that produces abominable works. This is not a generalization that all atheists are evil people constantly occupied with doing evil. The point is that without the morality and justice that stem from the commandments of the Lord, the path of the ungodly can only ultimately lead to unrighteousness.

The psalm ends on a positive tone as David declares that salvation will indeed come out of Zion and that God will be a refuge for his people. David writes about a return from captivity and, in context, this does not refer to the Babylonian captivity but rather a situation of bondage and slavery. The root word of *return* and *restore* (שׁוּב, *shuv*) is also the root of *repent*. The implication is that in our own foolishness we

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can be bound and captivated in sinful ungodliness and yet restored to the Lord through active repentance. And this is available at any time.

1 Timothy 1:12-17. At the beginning of this Epistle, Paul emphasized that his authority as an apostle of Jesus the Messiah came through a commandment of God (v. 1). Paul admits that he did not deserve this calling. He was initially very antagonistic towards the emerging Jesus movement. Later Paul says he was a student of Gamaliel who in Acts 5 counselled the Sanhedrin to leave the followers of Jesus alone. Paul obviously did not listen to his teacher's wisdom and instead did the opposite. The good news is that our past, like Paul's disobedience, does not disqualify us from service to the Lord. God seeks the lost, and Paul had most definitely lost his way. The Messiah came to seek and save the sinners, not to condemn them and leave them in darkness. The life and witness of Paul are proof of the compassion of the saviour and that no one should consider themselves to be without hope and a future.

Luke 15:1-10. In the previous chapter, Jesus challenged the multitudes who were following him to Jerusalem with the true cost of discipleship and commitment to God (Luke 14:25-33). Interestingly, instead of his strong words pushing people away, they had the opposite effect and attracted certain people to Jesus: the sinners and tax collectors. The group of people attracted to Jesus were the dregs and outcasts of Jewish society. Tax collectors were seen as traitors who collected money for the Roman occupation. Sinners were considered to be in a state of ritual impurity and were avoided socially by those claiming moral superiority. The Pharisees then complained to Jesus about his choice of social companions.

Most of our Bibles include headings in our chapters, which we all know are not there in the original Greek text but were added later. These headings break the chapter into the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the Parable of the Lost Coin, and the Parable of the Prodigal Son. This implies that there are three separate parables of Jesus being grouped together by Luke. However, in reaction to the charge of eating with the unclean, verse 3 says that Jesus "spoke this parable". The whole chapter is actually one long parable in three parts. People can be lost outside in a crowd; they can be lost alone at home; they can be lost within a family. As with the sheep and the coin, the lost will never be found on their own. Without the hard work of the shepherd or the woman who searched her home, the lost will be doomed. While the sheep and the coin do nothing to help find themselves in the story, Jesus concludes each segment with the need for repentance. Jesus reminds us that God cares for each of us, even when we lose our way and perhaps become socially uncomfortable to others. The Lord rejoices when we repent and become "found". Despite the sinful rebellion of the ones who have lost their way, God joyfully receives them back. In the parable, the joy of finding is shared with others. Perhaps we should seek to share in the joy that the Lord has over the return of sinners into the Kingdom.

ACNA Readings

Exodus 32:1, 7-14. Moses's delay in returning from Mount Sinai raised concern among the people of Israel. This delay caused the people to stumble in faithfulness and desire that Aaron fashion gods for them to worship and proclaim as deliverers. At this indignant behaviour, God refers to the people of Israel as "your people" to Moses, disassociating himself from the rebellious nation he had redeemed from Egypt. While Moses has no idea what his brother Aaron is doing for the people, God knew exactly what was happening at the bottom of the mountain. He even quotes their own words to Moses. There are

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always consequences to actions, and in this situation, God makes a strong declaration that he will consume the nation and begin again with the family of Moses. Moses intercedes and God sets aside his wrath. His prayer is not long-winded but direct and to the point. Moses asks the Lord to remember his covenant. It's not that God forgot his promises to Abraham, as that would be impossible. Rather "remembering" in the biblical sense means putting things into action. The intercession of Moses succeeds and the people of Israel have no idea what has transpired. This is very much the pattern we see in the New Testament as the Epistle to the Hebrews states that the Messiah intercedes for us, yet we do not hear or see him do it.

Psalm 51:1-17. This psalm of David is regarded as a model of confession and is used as such both in Jewish and Christian liturgies. The psalm is titled in the Hebrew text as 'A psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him after he had gone into Bathsheba'. It is tradition that David penned this prayer as part of his confession and repentance before the Lord. The psalm is deeply emotional with the first several verses describing the dark nature of sin and the dark side of ourselves. The psalm also celebrates God's forgiveness, his lovingkindness and mercy, with verses 10-13 projecting the hope and light of forgiveness and salvation. Our reactions to the realization that we have sinned make a great difference to us, physiologically, socially, and spiritually. David does not attempt to justify his actions nor direct blame on anyone else. He simply appeals for the mercy of the Lord. This simple, honest and heartfelt request shows us there is much grace in the Hebrew Bible. Too many people, in an attitude of self-righteousness, despise the failings and weaknesses of others. David reminds us that this is not so with the Lord. The Lord will not abhor the repentant. Forgiveness and a restored relationship will be extended to each and everyone who repents, and there will be much rejoicing in heaven.

About the author. The Rev. Aaron Eime is a deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and a teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master's program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and Hebrew. He has taught internationally, including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.