

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

**RCL Readings** – Hosea 11:1-11; Psalm 107:1-9, 43; Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21

**ACNA Readings** – Ecclesiastes 1:12–2:11; Psalm 49; Colossians 3:5-17; Luke 12:13-21

**RCL Readings**

**Introduction.** Identity is one of those things that gets more abstract and less empirical the longer we think about it. The way we see ourselves can change according to circumstance, mood and what we are passionate about at the time. Much of our identity is wrapped up in what we do. We identify ourselves by our professions. This is one of the reasons that I love the Sabbath. On the Sabbath, I rest from my work, and I cannot say, 'I am Aaron the dentist' because on the Sabbath I am not a dentist. I don't act like a dentist nor work like one. Resting in the Lord helps me find my true identity, that I am a child of the living God.

**Common Theme.** Our readings this week lead us to reflect further on our identity as believers, as the redeemed of the Lord, and how that is expressed in a very practical way through our walk with Jesus. Our identity defines the choices we make. Choices have consequences, and so it is vitally important to maintain the right and true identity.

**Hosea 11:1-11.** The prophet Hosea often described God as a husband who has been rejected by Israel, his unfaithful wife. In this passage, God is also described as a father and Israel as a son. Only the Gospel of Matthew includes the story of the holy family escaping Herod's massacre of the infants of Bethlehem into Egypt. Upon returning to Israel, Matthew uses this text in describing Jesus' relationship as the Son of God. Here the prophet Hosea reminds Israel of her sacred history: God called Israel out of bondage into freedom from Egypt only for Israel to return to the slavery of idolatry of the Canaanite Baals. How easy it is for us to forget the love, the blessings and the care of the Lord. It is the Lord who sustains the whole world, but as verse 3 notes, the Lord 'taught Ephraim to walk ... but they did not know that I healed them'. If we are honest with ourselves, sometimes we too are unaware that our blessings come from God and not some other source like our own efforts. Despite the tragedy that the 'more they were called the more they went away', God does not abandon his people, nor us. Though God would be perfectly justified in punishing Israel and choosing another people more willing and able to serve him, he doesn't leave. The good news of God is counter-cultural. The Lord does not react to abandonment and rejection in the same way that we do because, as Hosea says, 'I will not execute my burning anger ... for I am God and not a man'. God's love and forgiveness are of a very different order. The final verses proclaim that his long-suffering, continual compassion and persistent mercy will have an ultimate effect in the prophetic return of his people to the land and in their renewed faithful walk with the Lord.

**Psalm 107:1-9, 43.** We are invited by the psalmist to declare our true state of being, that we are redeemed and that we should say so! Redemption is not something we should consider lightly nor forget. The psalm reminds the people that God redeemed them from Egypt and from exile. He redeemed them not because they had been particularly good or deserved it but because of the steadfast love and

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mercy of the Lord. The psalm speaks about those in the wilderness who were hungry and thirsty. The wilderness could not provide adequate provision. The psalm then declares that it is the Lord who 'satisfies the soul' and not the world. This is something we should all ponder and take to heart. The world can never provide enough to fulfil our desires, leaving us eventually drained, empty and abandoned. Mary quotes this verse following the visitation of Gabriel with the good news of the Incarnation. She knew the truth of God's word, that the Lord knows us better than we know ourselves and can provide the things that truly sustain and last.

**Colossians 3:1-11.** Our walk with the Lord is based firmly on the theological truth of the resurrection. The resurrection provides us with hope, a purpose and a new identity in the risen Messiah. The resurrection is more than an event: it's a person. Jesus says that he is the resurrection and the life! Because the resurrection is true then our identification with and in him becomes real and not something abstract. Jesus commanded us to seek first the Kingdom of God, and here Paul urges us to 'set our minds on things above'. Faith is not simply something that is in our heads. Faith is something that is walked out through practical expression in our day-to-day lives. Paul admonishes the follower of Jesus to get rid of sinful activity and lead a practical life that reflects an identity in Messiah. Jesus would not engage in any of the activities Paul lists here, therefore if we say we identify with him, we will not do these things either.

**Luke 12:13-21.** Between Luke 9 and Luke 19, 10 chapters detail the final journey of Jesus towards Jerusalem and the cross. Within those 10 chapters, we find a great deal of rich teaching material, much of it unique to Luke. While the parable of the rich fool is another unique account in Luke's Gospel, it is not unique in its Jewish context. There is a parallel story in a late Second Temple work called the Wisdom of Ben Sira (Sirach 11:18-19<sup>1</sup>) which carries very similar themes. The Hebrew Bible places the priesthood in the role of the judiciary in society. However, over time the priestly class had become corrupt. Thus in the late Second Temple Period, Jewish rabbis were sometimes called on to settle disputes and discern judgments, so it is not an uncommon request by this person in the crowd to request a judgment from Jesus in his favour. According to the Torah, the older brother received a double portion of the inheritance, so the law was already clear on this point. What the man was asking was not for Jesus to listen to both sides of the argument and make a righteous judgment but for Jesus to take sides against his brother. 'Tell my brother to divide the inheritance'. Jesus refuses as he had not come to pass judgments on such disputes but to challenge us on our basic attitudes towards earthly and heavenly treasures. 'Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions,' Jesus replies. To illustrate his point, Jesus teaches using a parable. The story of the rich farmer has been the basis for many a sermon and it still challenges us today. It is ironic that the man who took care to prepare for his needs is called the

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<sup>1</sup> Sirach 11:18-19: "One becomes rich through diligence and self denial, and the reward allotted to him is this when he says, 'I have found rest, and now I shall feast on my goods!' he does not know how long it will be until he leaves them to others and dies".

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‘fool’ in the story. Solomon reflects in Ecclesiastes 2:18-19 that despite toiling in this life to provide for himself, he must in the end leave everything for the one who comes after him. The rich farmer in the parable has ignored this ancient wisdom and made his possessions a basis for his identity and security in life and not the precepts of God.

### ACNA Readings

**Introduction.** We live in a time of chaos across the world. With several years of pandemic protocols, rising inflation, economic collapse, and the fear of traveling for many, it is easy to grasp any security that one can find. Yet, for all that, the Lord tells us to put our trust in him for our needs and to not look to the security of the world for our ultimate hope. This does not mean that one should just go jump off the cliff, but it does mean not to find your salvation in earthly security. The Lord takes care of his own and our true security is in him and the Age to Come.

**Common Theme.** The common theme throughout the lectionary readings concerns the transient nature of earthly possessions and gain. In much of the world today, particularly true here in the West, quality of life is considered to be the chief end of man. The person is to be focused on attaining material possessions, status, comfort, and experiences that are supplied by money. Yet, in these lectionary selections, we are told that the pursuit of such things in this manner is worthless and passes away upon death. Instead, the people of God ought to pursue the things of God and cultivate a heart that is humble and thankful; these are worthwhile pursuits.

**Ecclesiastes 1:12–2:11.** The reading from Ecclesiastes concerns the vanity of pursuing wealth and success. While the author of this book is not stated, simply calling himself “the preacher,” and a “son of David”, both rabbinic and Christian traditions identify the author as Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba. While this could be any son of David, if it is indeed Solomon, then this is likely his memoir near the end of his life, after his ungodly pursuits of fame, wealth, military might, and myriads of political marriages resulting in sexual pleasure.

The author of this book, however, states that all his accomplishments, no matter how grand, were nothing but vanity<sup>2</sup> and striving<sup>3</sup> after the wind (Eccl 1:14). The author notes that his accomplishments were quite grand, surpassing all others who had ever been in Jerusalem, and yet, in the end, it was meaningless if one wished to find satisfaction in it. This is a clear warning to all people who pursue earthly gain for their understanding of a purpose-filled life. It leaves only emptiness in its wake, only a mere vapor in substance and as hollow as pursuing, or dining upon, the wind.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (BDB), s.v. “הבל” He-vel: Vanity, vapor or breath.

<sup>3</sup> BDB, s.v. “רעות” reh-ooth: striving, might also mean to feed upon.

<sup>4</sup> Poetic play, “nothing but breath and striving after (feeding upon) wind.”

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**Psalm 49.** The superscription ascribes this psalm to the Sons of Korah. Korah was a man of the Tribe of Levi during the days of Moses and Aaron who sought to overthrow their leadership and establish himself as the new high priestly family. This resulted in Korah and his household being swallowed whole by the earth as God's judgment upon them (Num 16). Yet, though their households were swallowed up, Korah's sons survived this judgment (Num 26:9-11). These sons of Korah became great leaders in Israel, with Samuel the prophet coming from that line (cf. 1 Sam 1:1, 1 Chron 6:16-37) and others becoming doorkeepers and attendees in the tabernacle and temple, as well as music writers as recorded in the Psalms. This is a great contrast to the Korah who coveted the positions of Moses and Aaron. Korah's sons wrote Psalms extolling humility and hope in the Lord.

This psalm concerns the foolishness of those who place their hopes on riches and gain in this life. This is similar to the reading from Ecclesiastes. Both poor and rich die together; one cannot purchase eternal life from God with earthly goods. In the context of the psalm, the rich are the wicked who surround the righteous and oppress them. They have great lands, and even have places named after them, with the approval of those around them. Yet, for all this, they are destined to reside in Sheol forever. They are like a beast at the end of their lives, simply forgotten.

The righteous, however, places his trust in God and knows that God will deliver him, even from the grave. There are a few ways in which this is fulfilled. The first is the doctrine of the harrowing of hell, in which the Messiah descended into Hell upon his death and brought to the Father all the righteous who perished before his incarnation (Eph 4:8). The second is that upon death today, the righteous are before the Father (2 Cor 5:8). The third is in the resurrection to come when the righteous will again walk the earth in glorified bodies (1 Cor 15:35-58).

The righteous need not fear those who have such power and wealth here on earth, because their hope is far better than earthly success, and he that is in us is greater than he that is in the world.

**Colossians 3:5-17.** This letter, written by Saint Paul, concerns Christian character as contrasted with the characteristics of those of the world. The apostle here is quite emphatic: put to death those earthly things that reside in us. Do not make friends with them, do not put them in prison, do not even ignore and simply tolerate them. Put them to death. The list, though not exhaustive, mentions behaviors such as sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

While each of these is worth studying, in keeping with the theme of the readings, it is interesting to note what he says about covetousness. Covetousness is an inordinate desire for some object, prestige, or wealth. This is something that the apostle calls an earthly desire, and it is not neutral. Indeed, the apostle clarifies that this kind of desire for gain is a type of idolatry. From this stems the doctrine that idolatry can include desiring something out of proportion and pursuing it in an unhealthy way. Idolatry is not

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limited to worshipping a man-made idol in a pagan shrine. Christians today also struggle with covetousness, especially in a world that measures the worth of life based on the quality of life and comfort one can achieve. Neighbors are often better off than us, and entire TV shows concern themselves with the lifestyles of the rich and famous. The spirit of the age is a machine that fosters greed and pushes people to desire it as well.

In contrast, the apostle instructs his listeners to cultivate heavenly characteristics. These include: “compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:12-14). These contrast with the earthly desires. As regards covetousness, the antidote is humility towards one another. Instead of greed and desire for gain, Christians are to cultivate a humble heart that is content with what they have.

**Luke 12:13-21.** The lesson from the Gospel is concerned with the foolishness of hoarding wealth and planning one's future around it. In this lesson, Jesus tells a parable. A parable is a particular type of Jewish storytelling in which a teacher tells a story that conveys general biblical principles. This parable comes about as some person in the crowd around Jesus asks him to be an arbiter between his brother and him concerning their inheritance, presumably from their father. Jesus' reply to this man is two-fold. First, he has not been appointed a judge in this matter for them; they need to find someone else. Secondly, Jesus gets to the important aspect and admonishes the man to not pursue these treasures in a covetous manner; there are more important things at stake. We are not told exactly why this person sought Jesus out in this matter, but Jesus' reply indicates that it was inappropriate to do so. Likely, the brothers were suffering from greed as regards their inheritance.

In a form of Solomonic wisdom, Jesus' parable tells of a rich landowner who had an abundance of crops, so much so that he ran out of room to store all his possessions. Since his only thought was to keep hoarding this wealth, he decided to build bigger buildings to house all of it. He did this so that he could rest secure in his wealth. The rich man looked to his prosperity for his security in life and not the Lord. Yet, that very night the man died, with the Lord saying to him, “Your soul is required of you.” This should recall the lesson from the psalm which states, “Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, that he should live on forever and never see the pit” (Ps 49:7-9).

In the same way, those who are only concerned with security and prosperity in the age, and are not rich towards God, pursue empty things. Their accomplishments are, as the writer of Ecclesiastes noted, “vanity and a striving after wind” (Eccl 1:14). Instead, the people of God ought to pursue the Kingdom of Heaven and lay up their treasure for the Age to Come (Matt 6:19-21) rather than obsessing over their earthly possessions. This does not mean that those who are rich are somehow in sin. It does carry a

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warning to the rich, however, that if they view their earthly privileges as their source of meaning and security in their life then they must reassess where they have placed their faith.

**About the authors.**

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**ACNA Readings.** Aaron Gann earned his B.A. in Jewish Studies at the Moody Bible Institute and is currently studying for his M. Div. at Shepherds Theological Seminary in Cary, North Carolina. He and his wife, Rebecca, live in Raleigh with their two cats and serve at Redeemer Anglican Church. Aaron is an aspirant discerning a call to ordained ministry within the Anglican Church in North America in the Diocese of Christ Our Hope. Aaron has taught on various topics such as the Book of Psalms, Messianic Prophecy, Eschatology, and the non-pagan origins of the traditional church festivals. He is passionate about the Jewish roots of the Christian Faith, encouraging and nurturing biblical literacy, reaching the Jewish people with the Gospel of Christ, and developing within the Church a biblically informed love for Israel and the Jewish people.