

Sermon Notes from CMJ
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

RCL Readings – 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10; Psalm 48; 2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13

ACNA Readings – Ezekiel 2:1-7; Psalm 123; 2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13

Introduction. History is connected to geography. The events recorded in the Bible happened in a particular time and in a particular place. The Bible is clear to mark and describe the location of certain events where they happened, sometimes on a mountain or near a river and sometimes on a boat or in a valley. If God deems it important to record the place where things happened, then it certainly should not be something we ignore.

Common Theme. The old saying “location, location, location” is said three times to emphasize how important the concept is, usually in reference to business, but also in the Bible. Locations and places are a common theme in our readings this week. Jerusalem as a centre of worship and praise will be contrasted to Nazareth as a place of rejection and offence.

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10. This passage describes the anointing of David as king of the tribes of Israel following seven years of civil war. The prophet Samuel had previously anointed David while he had been a shepherd boy of 15 in his father’s house near Bethlehem. Now aged 30, David is anointed by the elders of Israel and moves his capital to Jerusalem. This passage demonstrates that David’s success, fame, and popularity grew over time. He was not an overnight success story, but rather he had time to prepare to be king. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit, and each of us needs time to prepare when the task ahead of us is great. Hebron had been David’s capital during the conflict with Saul; now the capital becomes Jerusalem. What prompted David to move there? The text does not comment on why. Perhaps it was a smart political move as Jerusalem was “neutral” territory and not allotted to any one of the 12 tribes. Perhaps there was a historical and theological connection with the mysterious king-priest Melchizedek who encountered the patriarch Abraham at this special place. God himself chooses to place his name at Jerusalem (2 Chr 6:6), so it is on the historical, political and spiritual map forever.

Psalm 48. This psalm is one of the 11 psalms attributed to the sons of Korah, the Levite rebel who challenged Moses in the desert. Apparently, the descendants of Korah learnt from their father’s rebellion and became worship leaders in the House of the Lord. This psalm is a song of praise where the praise is connected to a place, Jerusalem. Jerusalem is described as the city of the great king. Which great king would the worshippers who sing this psalm be thinking about? Kings come and kings go and some of them may even be great, but only one great king is eternal, and that is God himself. The Temple of God established Jerusalem as more than simply a capital. It was the focal point of sacred pilgrimage and prayers to the Lord. Jerusalem was idealized to become connected with the messianic heavenly Jerusalem. There are many famous cities in the world, many rich with natural resources and picturesque locations, but there is only one city with the Great King. Revelation describes a heavenly Jerusalem coming to earth at the end of time, so perhaps praise will always be connected to Jerusalem.

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2 Corinthians 12:2-10. The apostle cryptically describes a heavenly experience of “someone” who apparently had an out of body episode. Commentators often attribute this mysterious “person” as Paul himself. Should that be the case, then Paul is demonstrating some humility as just about anyone else would probably want to broadcast their experience on social media, uploading and sharing their adventures on YouTube and Facebook and telling the world. Instead, Paul chooses not to describe the experience, nor what he actually saw or heard; rather he chooses in this passage to describe his personal weakness. Most of us have a similar tendency to hide our faults and rarely expose our deficiencies to the public. Paul describes his vulnerability as a “thorn in the flesh.” No one really knows what Paul actually means by this. It is not like Paul lacked the words or the vocabulary to describe his “thorn”; he simply chose not to elaborate. Whatever it was, it certainly troubled him, and he prayed to have it removed but without relief. We can learn something through Paul’s experience for, as Paul declares, it is through that very weakness that he and many others saw the strength of the Messiah. Through his weakness, Messiah was stronger, and his honour and power were displayed. As a man of faith, Paul can even now say that he is “content” with it. This can be an encouragement to us all as we go through hard times. Sometimes in this broken world God’s best gifts are wrapped up in tragedy and suffering. It is not an easy thing to comprehend, but the truth is that Jesus overcomes all darkness, weakness, sickness, and strife to reveal his grace, mercy, compassion and love. When we are weak, then he is most certainly strong.

Mark 6:1-13. Although he was born in Bethlehem, Jesus grew up in the north of the country in the village of Nazareth. The ancient tribal boundaries no longer existed since the exile and the return from Babylon. The Jewish people still retained their tribal affiliation, such as Paul from Benjamin, Anna the prophetess from Asher, and Barnabas the Levite. In this Gospel passage, Jesus returns to Nazareth with disciples. Disciples at the time of Jesus accompanied their teachers 24/7. Discipleship was not something you did a few hours a day, a few days a week; it was a total commitment to a lifestyle. The home crowd do not know what to make of Jesus. He had departed as a carpenter (the meaning of the term probably lent itself to builder more than woodworker). Now he returns as a rabbi without ever having been the student of a rabbi. Jesus is called the “son of Mary,” and there is no mention here of Joseph. Even if Joseph has died, Jesus should still have been called the “son of Joseph.” It appears that the rumours of his illegitimate birth had not gone away, so this is most likely a derogatory term. In this instance, the saying “familiarity breeds contempt” rings true, and instead of enjoying the good teaching of Jesus or marvelling at the healings he is performing, they are offended by him. Recall that in a previous visit to Nazareth, after his time in the wilderness, Jesus arrived without disciples, preached, and was nearly thrown off the cliff by the locals (Luke 4).

Interestingly the Gospel says that Jesus was constrained in power in some way, that somehow his work was limited because of their unbelief. We should note that there is a difference between having no belief and having unbelief. Jesus is in a synagogue after all. People have gathered there because they believe in God and desire to worship him, but they have no desire to see any good or potential work of God in Jesus. Throughout sacred history, God has desired to partner with Humanity in revealing himself to the

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world. God could have destroyed Egypt and its false gods without Moses. He could have revealed himself to the nations without Israel, and Jesus could spread the gospel through direct revelation without our participation. Yet he chooses to partner with us and send us out into the world to declare his salvation. God delights to reveal himself to Humanity through humans. Thus, after his rejection at Nazareth, Jesus engages with the world by sending his disciples out with his authority and power. We can see the contrast of faithful disciples equipped with the power of Jesus to heal and bind demons against the unbelief of Nazareth where the ministry of Jesus was diminished. The good news is that rejection, weakness, and opposition are not impediments to the growth of the kingdom. Satan himself has been unable to stop the spread of the gospel.

ACNA Addendum

Ezekiel 2:1-7. A stubborn and rebellious people is the feature of the prophet Ezekiel in this portion. Ezekiel is the only prophet to be given the epitaph “son of man.” The phrase occurs some 93 times in the Book of Ezekiel. It means essentially “human being” or “mortal.” The other time the term Son of Man is used is in the Book of Daniel, and there it references the eschatological redeemer figure. The word of the Lord comes to Ezekiel through the Spirit. God sends the prophet to a difficult crowd, to a rebellious people who will stubbornly refuse the message. God instructs Ezekiel not to be afraid. Even though rejection can hurt, God gives us the admonition against fear. Fear is actually the greatest enemy of the gospel. Persecution does not stop church growth; it does the opposite. Fear, however, can stop us from doing anything. Fear of rejection can silence our lips from sharing; fear of opposition can keep us from going out and expressing our faith. God tells us not to be afraid. How? “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear,” 1 John 4:18 declares. We have to internalize and believe in the overwhelming love of God.

Psalms 123. One of the songs of ascent, Psalm 123 is a short song that rhymes in Hebrew. Its short length, a scant four verses, reminds us of the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5 that prayer should not be long-winded. The psalm pairs well with the Gospel passage as the psalmist petitions the Lord against scorn and contempt. The ridicule of others can be very off-putting for us. It can bring us down emotionally, which saps our energy and can reduce our effort and desire to express God’s will. Jesus identifies with us in this feeling as the contempt he experienced in Nazareth greatly reduced his ministry there. The psalm encourages the worshipper to look to the Lord for strength, appealing to God to be merciful and relieve the derision. It is the character of God to be merciful, and thus we have hope that he will indeed bring healing and relief.

About the author. The Rev. Aaron Eime is the deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and 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

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