

Sermon Notes from CMJ
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

RCL Readings – 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12-19; Psalm 24; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:14-29

ACNA Readings – Amos 7:7-15; Psalm 85; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:7-13

Introduction. I believe that one of our responsibilities as parents is to teach our children that there are always consequences to actions. Should we fail to teach this, then life itself will teach them the hard way! Consequences are where our actions are met by reality. Consequences can be big or small, good or bad, and all too often we cannot foresee with accuracy the repercussions of many of our actions. Many of our actions are irreversible, and we simply have to deal with the results of our behaviour.

Common Theme. In this week's readings, I will be highlighting some of the consequences of actions that we see in the stories of the kings, prophets, apostles, and Jesus himself.

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12-19. There are two attempts by King David to bring the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. The lectionary reading in Samuel contains sections of both occasions but skips over some of the more important events in the middle. On the first occasion (vv. 1-5), David gathers his elite military men to honour the Lord and places the ark on a cart pulled by oxen. A livestock-pulled cart was the previous method by which the Philistines returned the ark to Israel. David and all Israel proceed to Jerusalem in euphoria with music and dancing. What the lectionary misses is how the Lord strikes Uzzah dead after Uzzah touched the ark to steady it after the oxen stumbled.

David becomes angry and confused. He doesn't understand why this disaster has befallen him. He was doing a good thing, wasn't he? David may have had good intentions of transporting the ark to Jerusalem, but they were accompanied by wrong actions. How so? The ark was designed to be carried. The Bible clearly describes who should carry the ark in Numbers 4:15. A particular Levitical family, known as the sons of Kohath, have the responsibility and the honour of transporting the ark. David and his advisors should have been familiar with the Torah and known this. However, David gathered warriors as an honour guard and used cattle as the means to transfer the ark of God. The desire to move the ark to Jerusalem was good, but the way David went about the task was not appropriate. David's anger at Uzzah's death causes him to delay his plan to bring the ark to Jerusalem, so the ark rests with Obed-Edom. The text in Samuel calls him a Gittite, which would make him a Philistine residing with the people of Israel. His name means "servant of Edom." The parallel account in 1 Chronicles 26 instead records him as part of a Levitical family. Regardless of his background, his household is blessed by the presence of the ark. David is informed of the blessing and tries again to move the ark. David's appropriate preparations for the second attempt (vv. 12-19) result in his successfully taking the ark to Jerusalem.

In verse 14, David wears a linen ephod, indicating that he is dressed like a priest, not dancing semi-naked. Middle Eastern dancing is not a solo affair, and David was most likely dancing with other men and not alone. This, unfortunately, causes some marital issues between David and Michal, David's

Sermon Notes from CMJ
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

first wife and daughter of King Saul. All actions have repercussions. David's intention to place the ark in Jerusalem is a good one, but the wrong way of doing things had unintended consequences. Michal's indignation toward her husband ends with a broken relationship and a childless marriage.

Psalm 24. This psalm of David has, in some sources, been described as a dedication prayer by David for his son Solomon to be sung during the consecration of the temple. The praise begins with describing how God owns not only the earth but all its inherent bounty. Why does everything belong to the Lord? Simply because he created the world. The prayer asks a question of the worshiper: if God is the creator king of all things, then who can stand before him? What follows is a series of Hebrew parallelisms where the consecutive sentences help enlighten each other.

In verse 3, the "hill of the Lord" is paralleled to "his holy place." The psalm is clearly describing the Temple Mount and no other. The question to the worshiper is answered in verse 4: the one who has clean hands and heart can stand before the Lord. The parallelism communicates that idolatry is a work of the hands, and controlling the tongue is a work of the heart. Hands and heart, deeds and intention are interlinked and inseparable. Each action of our hands and each desire of our heart will have consequences. Verse 5 describes that those with clean hands and pure hearts receive a blessing: salvation and righteousness. In the story of the ark of the covenant, there was a blessing in the very real presence of the Lord. In Psalm 24, the gates of the temple, called the ancient gates, are commanded to be opened as the presence of the King of Glory—that is, the Lord of Hosts—comes and brings his blessing, the blessing of his presence!

Ephesians 1:3-14. In the original Greek, verses 3-14 form one very long sentence from Paul. He begins in a common Jewish tradition, which is to bless God before doing anything else. The blessing is mutual as Paul says, we ourselves are blessed in the Messiah. The blessings of the Lord are not simply earthly and temporal, where they can be lost or taken away. Paul is writing of our "spiritual blessings" that pertain to the heavenly realms and therefore are a higher and superior form of blessing. Before there even was a temporal world, we were known by God and chosen by him. God acted out his redemption in creation through the blood of the Messiah, and now we have become part of that mysterious commonwealth of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. It is very comforting to know that believers are chosen by God, not at random, but by his good pleasure. The Lord's actions on our behalf have profound consequences. His washing us in the blood of Jesus and sealing us with the Holy Spirit causes us to both be holy (salvation by faith) and blameless (holiness in our actions) before him.

Mark 6:14-29. The Gospel portion opens noting that there is some confusion as to the identity of Jesus in the Jewish world. His own hometown knows him to be a carpenter's son. Jesus' healings, deliverances from demons, and teachings have others speculating that he is Elijah—who prophecy said was to appear before the Messiah—or one of various other figures and prophets. Apocryphal Jewish texts in the late Second Temple Period recorded traditions of appearances by Jeremiah during the

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Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

Maccabean revolt and Habakkuk assisting the exiles in Babylon. There was much conjecture as to who would appear leading up to the days of the Messiah. Yet few in the text seem to consider Jesus to actually be the Messiah, rather surmising him to be, instead, part of the prophetic line. Herod considers him to be a resurrected John the Baptist.

The Herodian dynasty was replete with many monarchs called Herod, and it can get confusing as to which Herod is being referred to in the Gospels. The Herod who was involved with the beheading of John the Baptist is Herod Antipater, also known as Antipas. He divorced his wife Phasaelis, the daughter of a Nabatean king called Aretas, and married Herodias, his half-brother's wife. This resulted in a disastrous war between Rome and Judah against the Nabateans, in which Antipas lost Damascus to Aretas, a very ill-fated consequence of Herod's actions. John the Baptist challenged the illegitimate relationship and was arrested for his constant condemnation of Herod and Herodias. Herod's careless tongue produces deadly fruit when it delivers a vague promise that, with clever manipulation by Herodias, results in John's execution.

ACNA Addendum

Amos 7:7-15. Amos was a contemporary of Hosea and Isaiah, and although originally from Judah, his ministry was in the northern kingdom of Israel. Interestingly and possibly quite uniquely, Amos makes references to Isaac instead of Abraham as a metaphor for the nation of Israel. In keeping with the theme of consequences to actions, Amos began his career as a shepherd and tender of sycamore-fig trees. Amos declares himself to have no particular prophetic upbringing, yet he is still called to be a prophet. Perhaps it was because Amos was being faithful in tending flocks and agriculture that God called him to faithfully proclaim the Word of the Lord. Israel had been experiencing a period of relative prosperity but also a serious spiritual decline in observing God's law. The centres of idolatry in Bethel and Dan continued to lead Israel away from the Lord. The consequence would be the impending Assyrian invasion and exile.

Psalm 85. Penned by the sons of Korah, scholars debate when this psalm first appeared. Was this psalm a prophetic song before the exile and destruction of the first temple? Are the sons of Korah prophetically speaking of the return from Babylon? Or was the psalm created during the rebuilding and reconstruction under Nehemiah? Regardless, the composers find comfort in God's care for his land. While the whole earth is indeed the Lord's, the opening line references Israel as "your land." Verse 2 then pairs the land of Israel with the people of Israel to whom God has shown forgiveness. The exile had resulted from a spiritual falling away from God. Israel had embraced foreign gods and broken his covenant. The consequence was Assyrian captivity (and later, Babylonian exile for Judah). This might have tempted Israel to hopelessly abandon the Lord forever. There is always a consequence to any action, whether good and bad, and there is a consequence for repentance. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, and he forgives his people when they repent and turn again to him. Verse 8 says, "the Lord will speak ...

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Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

to those who turn to him in their hearts," verse 10 says, "righteousness and peace will kiss," and in verse 12, the "Lord will give what is good," all true and beautiful promises that God delights to bless on those who return to him.

Mark 6:7-13. Following the rejection Jesus faced in his hometown of Nazareth, he gathers his disciples and sends them out in pairs. The text notes deliberately it is the 12 disciples that he is sending. It is quite possible that Jesus actually had more followers, including female disciples, and that here Jesus is setting a special task for the inner circle of "the twelve" and imbuing them with his authority. They are armed with very limited resources: no bag, no bread, and no coinage. This goes against almost every missionary practice done today. Today, when we want to send people out on the mission field, we draw up budgets, we spend time fundraising, we prepare by learning the local dialects and traditions. The disciples really only had two options: obey their master and his instructions and go, or not. Look at the result of their obedience: they preached repentance; they healed people and drove out demons. Those that offered them the proper hospitality would gain the fellowship of the disciples for the whole time they preached in that location. The consequence for not providing assistance or not responding to the message of repentance would be some eschatological abhorrence on the day of judgement worse than that wrought against Sodom and Gomorrah. That might seem like quite a harsh judgment from Jesus. However, the principle of actions and consequences has grave spiritual repercussions when it pertains to rejecting Jesus as Lord and Saviour. You do not have to believe in Jesus, but there is a consequence for not doing so.

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 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.