

Sermon Notes from CMJ
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

RCL Readings – 2 Samuel 7:1-14; Psalm 89:20-37; Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

ACNA Readings – Isaiah 57:14-21; Psalm 22:23-31; Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-44

Introduction. Salvation in the Bible is universal. By universal, I do not imply any unitarian theology nor universalism, in which everyone gets saved. What I mean is that God is the King, not just of Israel but of the whole world. This is reflected throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and even in modern Jewish prayer life. While Jesus did indeed come to the lost sheep of Israel, he proceeded to send his disciples to the ends of the earth, enacting the promises of God to redeem the world.

Common Theme. Sometimes the lectionary presents texts that have no obvious common themes, and there is no need to stretch the texts to find one. The psalm pairs well with the Samuel portion, whereas the Gospel portion has other things to teach us. All Scripture is worthy of our attention and study, and each of us will find something a little different that inspires, encourages, and teaches us.

2 Samuel 7:1-14. This passage of Scripture introduces the Davidic Covenant. This is an unconditional covenant that God makes with David through Nathan the prophet. The Davidic Covenant includes several elements: firstly that the Lord reaffirms a land for the people of Israel (v. 10), then the establishment of the House of David that will endure forever. The promise of a dynasty “forever” pertained to both Solomon and subsequent progeny, including the coming Messiah. The messianic redeemer would come through the Davidic line.

With the conclusion of the civil war and the establishment of the capital in Jerusalem, David turns his attention to the Ark of God. His desire is to construct a temple for the Lord, and so he consults his prophet, Nathan. Every Israelite king had access to a prophet, and the relationship was often a tense one. The only king not to have a prophet was Solomon. The Ark of the Covenant had stood in Shiloh in the Tabernacle for 369 years until its capture by the Philistines. Now it was housed in a tent in Jerusalem. The actual word David uses to describe the structure around the ark is “curtains.” The tabernacle or *mishkan* in Hebrew had been deconstructed following the loss of the ark and, as a holy object that housed the presence of God, was stored for safekeeping. Second Maccabees 2:4-8 records that Jeremiah hid the tabernacle and the ark prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Interestingly Amos 9:11 speaks prophetically of rebuilding “David’s fallen tent,” not rebuilding the temple nor the tabernacle.

Nathan initially confirms David's desire to build a temple, however, in a dream to Nathan later that night, the Lord disapproves of the request. We should note with humility that both David and Nathan have the Holy Spirit, however, we see that having the Spirit does not make people infallible. David was eager to do something for God and construct a beautiful temple. When God turned him down, David was perhaps initially taken aback. However, God goes on to say that instead of accepting a gift from David, God intended to give a gift to David and ultimately to the whole world.

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Psalm 89:20-37. This psalm is attributed to Ethan the Ezrahite, who, according to 1 Kings 4:31, is a contemporary of Solomon. Ethan was also a man famous in Israel for his wisdom, yet surpassed by the wisdom of Solomon. Psalm 89 is often paired with 2 Samuel 7 in that it carries many of the thoughts expressed by God to Nathan the prophet. The psalm declares that the promises of God to David will be fulfilled and that God's promises are true. Verse 35 says that the Lord "will not lie to David." God reminds us again in the psalm that his covenant will stand firm. Many of us can feel the pressure of anxiety caused by the constant uncertainty in the world. It can be comforting to know that God remains solid, unchangeable, and faithful to fulfil his word and his covenants. The reassurance we find in Psalm 89 is deepened when we read that God's love also "stands firm forever" (v. 28). The Davidic Covenant with which this psalm is paired is unconditional. God's love for us and this world is likewise unconditional and endures forever.

Ephesians 2:11-22. Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians addresses Gentiles, although the community was probably a mix of Gentiles and Jews. The concern of this passage is what does salvation through the Messiah mean for social boundaries and relationships between Jews and Gentiles within the new community. This is encapsulated in describing the new people of God as a spiritual holy temple. Prior to reconciliation to God through Jesus, the Gentiles were "aliens or non-citizens" from Israel and "strangers" to the covenantal promises. They were without hope and had no true knowledge or access to God. Paul describes what God has done through Jesus by describing the abolishing of the "wall of separation." The wall is a metaphor for the animosity that existed historically between Jewish people and Gentiles. Paul describes it as "hostility," and history is replete with examples of extreme hostility and prejudice between Jews and Gentiles. In a world that has known too much war, it is good news to hear that Jesus brings peace to both groups of peoples. The two groups are bound together into a new spiritual building. Paul does not call it "the temple" but "a temple." Many groups in the first century described themselves as the "true temple," such as the Dead Sea community at Qumran. Paul says that "You also are built together as a dwelling place for God." The community, the Church, is described as a building in which everyone is called a "citizen." The new reality in the Messiah is that he dwells within this new community and within all his people. The promises of the Davidic Covenant are realized in the risen Jesus.

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56. Following a successful ministry trip described in Mark 6:7-12, the disciples return to Jesus and report. They had preached the Kingdom, cast out demons and healed many people. Now it was time for some rest. Sometimes taking time off in our busy schedules seems an impossible thing to do. Sometimes we also feel guilty for even having the desire to stop work for a while. However, Jesus shows us that taking a break must also be part of our itinerary. The pattern has been set for us by God himself in creation. God rested on the Sabbath, and he called it holy. Everything else during creation is called good, but the Sabbath was called holy. So it is kind of important. Jesus and his disciples attempt to locate a quiet place by boat. Some alone time was not to be, however, as people

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recognize him and gather in large crowds. How did they recognize Him? Most likely they had seen and heard Jesus before and came for more teaching and healing. One of the characteristics of the Good Shepherd is that Jesus has compassion. He knows what people need, and he provides it. The disciples needed rest, and the people needed teaching, and so Jesus provided both.

The next event occurs in the region of Gennesaret, not too far from Capernaum, in the land of Naphtali on the shores of the Galilee. *Gennesaret* comes from a compound of two Hebrew words, “*Gan*” means “garden,” and “*sar*” is the word for “prince.”¹ Gennesaret means “garden of the princes.”² Jesus is becoming quite popular and is also recognized here in this fertile area. On this occasion, the people are in need of healing. Many might have heard of the healing of the woman who touched the fringes of Jesus’ cloak and seek to do the same thing. Jesus does not send them away nor berate them for requiring physical healing. Jesus knows what his people need, and he provides. The weary are given rest; the sick are provided healing, and those that can hear are given teaching.

ACNA Addendum

Isaiah 57:14-21. The Hebrew Bible loves tension, when two concepts that might seem diametrically opposed are held close together in the text as a mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven. This mystery is contemplated and meditated on by the hearers and readers of the Scriptures. As David says in Psalm 119:15, “I will meditate on your precepts and regard your ways.” In this passage by Isaiah, God is titled as the “high and lofty one inhabiting eternity.” This reflects his majesty and heavenly glory. The mystery in this passage is that God dwells both in the high and holy place (that is, in heavenly realms), but also with those who have humble hearts here on earth. How he does such a thing is the mystery we are prompted to meditate on. Isaiah also brings in something mysterious concerning the future peace and healing from the Lord. At the same time as God says there is no peace for the wicked, the Lord also says there will be peace for the far and the near. Prophetically, the “near” are the people of God, and the “far off” are the Gentiles. Paul describes Jews and Gentiles in the same terms in the Ephesians passage. Yet both groups will be given peace and healing. This is a wonderful mystery of the kingdom, that in the New Covenant, blessings of peace, salvation, healing and more come to all peoples as they are drawn together into the people of God.

¹ While the text says “Γεννησαρέτ”, the site’s name is actually “Γεννεσάρ” (*Ginnesar*; Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990], 244), in which we can better see the original Hebrew behind the Greek.

² Some older lexicons may equate Gennesaret with Kinneret, another name for the Sea of Galilee, and say that both names mean “harp.” Rather, Kinneret is the name of a Canaanite fertility goddess; a shrine to her has been found near the Karei Deshe Hostel near Kibbutz Ginosar.

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Psalm 22:23-31. All who fear the Lord are given a command, to praise the Lord. Fear is the greatest enemy of the gospel and is usually a negative term. However, the fear mentioned here is the awe, the reverence, and the wonder aspects of fear. Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Those that do fear the Lord are also called upon to praise his name. Initially, it is Israel that is called on to praise God in verse 23. A few sentences later in verse 27 the scope is widened to invite all the families of the earth to worship the Lord. The Psalms are the prayer book of the Jewish people. Interestingly, when the Psalms talk about salvation, they always have a universal application. The Psalms call for the Gentiles to praise the Lord and to be included in the day of salvation. The Prophets and the Psalms look forward to the time when Jews and Gentiles will be drawn together to praise God. This good news of the kingdom is accomplished through the work of the Messiah Jesus.

Mark 6:30-44. The Gospel portion includes the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. A crowd had gathered around Jesus, and he had spent the day teaching them. The disciples come to Jesus late in the day and tell him to send the people away to go purchase food. We might think this was a smart idea. Due to the size of the crowd and the limited resources of the disciples, it would have been prudent to disperse the crowd before nightfall. However, in its Jewish context, this is actually a terrible thing to do. Disciples never, repeat, never tell their master what to do. The master tells his disciples what to do, not the other way around. Instead of berating the disciples, Jesus answers the disciples with a command of his own, instructing them to feed the crowd. Jesus had spent all day giving the people spiritual food. The disciples saw the problem only in the physical sense of literal food, which, to be fair, is a real concern, too.

As Psalm 23 says, “He makes me lie down in green pastures”; Jesus the Good Shepherd makes the people sit down in groups on the green grass. Jesus proceeds to start the miracle with what the disciples already have. They have five loaves and two fish, which is not a lot. Jesus is showing us that he can work with small. God can work with faith even as small as a mustard seed. Jesus also organizes the people into groups, showing that God is a God of order.

Jesus then blesses the small humble meal. The blessing for bread is called *הַמּוֹצֵי* (*hamotzi*). A generation before Jesus, it is recorded in *Sefer Brechot* that the sages Hillel and Shamai were debating when the blessing should be said and how many times. Is the blessing with each individual loaf of bread or one blessing for each meal? Thus we know that the words Jesus used to bless the bread were most likely these: “Blessed are you, the Lord our God, King of the Universe; you bring forth bread from the earth.” After blessing God, the disciples hand out the bread. Note, the blessing is to bless God for the bread, not to bless the bread itself. As the disciples hand out the ever-multiplying bread, they perhaps ponder the profound teaching that Jesus is giving them. The blessing declares that God brings forth bread, and now Jesus is the one bringing forth bread, both physical and spiritual bread. Through this great miracle, Jesus declares that he indeed is divine. To finish the point, each disciple still has a full basket of food remaining after the crowd had eaten. God’s provision is overflowing.

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