

**Sermon Notes from CMJ**  
11th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

**RCL Readings** – 2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33; Psalm 130; Ephesians 4:25-5:2; John 6:35, 41-51

**ACNA Readings** – Deuteronomy 8:1-10; Psalm 34; Ephesians 4:25-5:2; John 6:35, 41-51

**Introduction.** What is it that sustains us and our faith in Jesus the Messiah? Is it the miracles, powerful events in our lives, attending conferences and hearing gifted speakers? None of those are bad things, of course, many of them are incredibly helpful in our faith journey, however, the thing they all have in common is that they don't last. The voice of the speaker fades; the powerful experience and emotional music fades; the amazing conference we went to reduces to a distant memory that becomes difficult to recall. What lasts? Only God lasts, and the word of the Lord endures forever.

**Common Theme.** Our readings this week bring us to reflect on what truly sustains us and our communities. We are encouraged to seek the things that last, to grasp eternal life as a present gift and sustain ourselves with the 'bread of heaven'.

**2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33.** The period of the Judges reveals that there were tensions between the tribes of Israel. Apparently these tribal rifts did not disappear with the monarchy, and Absalom exploited these tensions. David was the rightful king anointed by God, but Israel was persuaded by Absalom's charisma, his erudite speech and luxurious hair. What was it that convinced Israel to rebel and follow Absalom? Probably many things, from political discontent, a sense of injustice, jealousy and covetousness against Jerusalem, and perhaps even some religious dissatisfaction. Many of these complaints against David may have been justified, but even so, rebellion against God was not. None of what the Israelites now wanted in Absalom was going to last. Instead of looking to God and his anointed king, the people of Israel chose their own path, and it ended poorly. Our passage opens by telling us that David loved his rebellious son and wanted his generals to capture Absalom alive. The experienced leadership of David's warriors proved decisive during the battle, and the upstart army of rebels was defeated. The text hints of divine intervention as even nature fought with David, and the woods claimed more victims than the sword. During the battle, Absalom's flaming hair became his downfall, and he was slain. David loved his son so much that he says he would have died in his place if he could. But he could not. That is something Jesus, the son of David, could and would do to forgive our own rebellious sin.

**Psalm 130.** Psalm 130 is one a few prayers collectively called the Penitential Psalms. The designation comes from a seventh century Roman scholar called Cassiodorus. This psalm describes someone at the emotional and spiritual rock bottom. The psalmist cries his appeal to God from 'the depths'. The psalm describes someone in deep personal struggle seemingly engulfed in danger. The psalmist is in a dark place. The danger is not defined, but it doesn't need to be. The struggle is personal. When in a dark place, God may seem distant, and perhaps we ask if God can really hear from seemingly far away. The answer is yes! Not only can God hear but he 'considers well' our supplications. The second verse begins with an admission of guilt, a spiritually healthy confession by the worshipper. The psalmist also has a relationship with God because they know that there is forgiveness with God. The next four verses reflect

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how the psalmist is sustained by the Lord during those dark times. Deep in the soul of the worshipper there is hope in the word of the Lord. Even the soul is sustained by patience whilst awaiting God's mercy and redemption. This prayer is very emotional, spiritually personal, and deeply introspective. As we pray this psalm, we can ask ourselves these questions:

- What do we wait for during our dark times?
- What sustains us when we feel overwhelmed?
- Do we hold on to the promises of hope in the word of God?

The psalm ends by reminding us that, with the Lord, there is mercy, plenteous redemption, and forgiveness of sins.

**Ephesians 4:25-5:2.** Paul continues to encourage the believers to behave as believers. A few verses before our lectionary portion, Paul admonishes the Ephesians to 'no longer walk as Gentiles' (Eph 4:17ff). The early church was emerging among the predominantly pagan, Gentile nations of the Greco-Roman world. Roman Hellenism contained an abundance of idolatry, magic, and immorality. Judaism and the messianic faith brought morals and ethics. Now Paul urged his readers not to behave as they had previously done as pagan Gentiles but to live by the moral and ethical standards of Jewish Christianity. Many of Paul's admonitions are sourced in the commandments. For example, Paul says, 'Speak the truth... don't steal... and work honestly'. Anger is recognized as a real emotion for people, but Paul counsels that we should not act in anger. Anger in and of itself is not sin, as God himself gets angry. Uncontrolled aggression may result in many sins and the breaking of fellowship within the believing community. Control over our emotions and right behaviour gives 'no room for the devil', as Paul would say. Instead we are a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit, whom we are urged not to grieve. The Ephesians are in community and fellowship with each other through the Spirit and through right behaviour. Thus Paul encourages people to speak truth, share wealth, and encourage each other in the faith. Ignoring Paul's request could result in our behaviour and talk causing grief and hurt to each other and to the Holy Spirit that lives in our midst. Lastly, Paul desires that we become imitators of God in his characteristics of loving-kindness, truth, and generosity. These are the things that last and sustain a community.

**John 6:35, 41-51.** The teaching on the Bread of Life was, perhaps understandably, confusing to some of the hearers. Jesus has claimed several times in this chapter that he had 'come down from heaven', thus declaring openly that he has heavenly origins. For the initial doubters, the idea of anyone 'coming down from Heaven' or having to 'eat living bread' might easily have caused consternation. Jesus describes himself in many ways through figures of speech, such as the Shepherd, the Door, the Branch, the Root of Jesse. At its core, though, the teaching on the Bread of Life is about what really sustains us. The manna in the wilderness could only sustain people for a limited time, and it certainly could not make anyone live forever. Jesus is asking us not to look for things that are only temporary, which is essentially

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everything in the material world. Jesus is teaching us to focus on eternal, spiritual realities. Jesus is the Bread of Life, and the life that he offers us is eternal life. This is where the spiritual connects with the material, and this teaching has applications for us in the here and now. Eternal life is not something we receive only when we die. Jesus says, ‘Whoever believes has eternal life’, not *had* eternal life and not *will have* eternal life, but *has* eternal life right now. The good news is that we have eternal life right now and not merely a hope for the future. That knowledge and belief can sustain us in personal tough times, and it can impact our behaviour in so many positive ways for our families and for our communities.

**ACNA Addendum**

**Deuteronomy 8:1-10.** Moses is speaking here in God’s name, urging the people not to forget the commandments of God after they conquer the Promised Land, a failure that is unfortunately realized after Joshua. God calls the Land of Israel a ‘good land’. Good is a descriptive word that the Lord uses often. He called the things he fashioned during each day of creation ‘good’, and now he calls the land good. God knows what is good and what is not good, so the land of Israel must be good! This section of Deuteronomy includes the seven species of agricultural products special to the ‘good land’ of Israel. These are wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olive oil and date honey. Only the first fruits from these seven products were to be offered in the Temple as ‘the First Fruits offering’. Moses mentions that God blessed Israel with lots of rock and that copper was an available mineral source. Deuteronomy 8:10 is also the reason Jewish people say grace at the conclusion of the meal and not before the meal, as in the Christian tradition. Eat and be satisfied, and then bless the Lord! So why do we find Jesus blessing bread before a meal in the New Testament without anyone complaining? The tradition of blessing God (not the food itself) before a meal was an introduction of the late Second Temple period. The conclusion of the rabbis was, ‘If saying a blessing at the end is good, saying one at the beginning and at the end must be better’.

There is also a lot about remembering in this passage. The command to remember is the most common command that God gives in the Bible. Remembering is not always about ‘forgetting’ as even God remembers. Of course, God cannot forget. The first time the Bible says, ‘God remembers’ is Genesis 8:19, where it is written, ‘And God remembered Noah’. Whenever we see God remembering, we also see him acting. Memory spurs you to action. This is the case in this portion of Scripture too. In verses 2-5, Moses urges the people to remember all the miracles in the wilderness. Then in verse 6 he says, ‘Therefore keep the commandments [do something] by walking in his ways’. The connection between remembering and doing is also seen in the New Testament when Jesus, at his Last Supper, commands us to ‘do this to remember me’.

**Psalm 34.** The superscript of this psalm attributes it to David when he feigned madness before Abimelech. Abimelech means ‘My father is king’ and is perhaps not a name of a person but a title of the ruler. 1 Samuel 21 records the actual name of the Philistine king as Achish. The psalm begins in

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triumphant fashion. David has been delivered from his enemies and his response is suitably to bless and praise the Lord. Even when David had acted foolishly God had not abandoned him for, ‘This poor man cried out and the Lord heard him’. David declares that the Angel of the Lord encamps around his people, and this verse has led some commentators to ponder the existence of guardian angels. While this is not a proof text of angelic defenders, it is at the very least consistent with the idea. Verse 8 brings in the figure of speech ‘taste and see that the Lord is good’. It’s an interesting choice of words to describe the experience of knowing God. Taste and sight are both part of the five senses that assist us in noticing the world around us. For David, experiencing God’s goodness and faithfulness was something that was physically tangible. Those who seek the Lord lack no good thing, as opposed to the ‘young lions’. Young lions is a metaphor for the youth who think they are at the top of the food chain, yet are the ones who end up suffering lack. David invites us to experience God in a real way. We are encouraged to allow the Lord and his goodness to be our sustenance.

**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.