

PENTECOST 12

Proper 17 - Year C

This Bible study was written by Louise Samuelson for Proper 17 (C) in 2016.

Jeremiah 2:4-13

⁴ Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. ⁵ Thus says the Lord:

What wrong did your ancestors find in me
that they went far from me
and went after worthless things and became worthless themselves?

⁶ They did not say, "Where is the Lord,
who brought us up from the land of Egypt,
who led us in the wilderness,
in a land of deserts and pits,
in a land of drought and deep darkness,
in a land that no one passes through,
where no one lives?"

⁷ I brought you into a plentiful land
to eat its fruits and its good things.
But when you entered you defiled my land
and made my heritage an abomination.

⁸ The priests did not say, "Where is the Lord?"
Those who handle the law did not know me;
the rulers transgressed against me;
the prophets prophesied by Baal
and went after things that do not profit.

⁹ Therefore once more I accuse you,
says the Lord,
and I accuse your children's children.

¹⁰ Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look;
send to Kedar and examine with care;
see if there has ever been such a thing.

¹¹ Has a nation changed its gods,
even though they are no gods?
But my people have changed their glory
for something that does not profit.

¹² Be appalled, O heavens, at this;
be shocked; be utterly desolate,
says the Lord,

¹³ for my people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me,
the fountain of living water,
and dug out cisterns for themselves,
cracked cisterns
that can hold no water.

Commentary from Louise Samuelson

In this passage of contrasts, God's people are confronted with the senselessness of turning away from their God. Prophets falsely prophesy for no profit. The people, whom God has blessed over and over, chase after gods who are not even gods. Pursuing worthless things made the people themselves worthless. And the one true God, who is described as the fountain of living water, is abandoned and the people try to collect life-water in containers with cracks.

It is our tendency as humans to try to satisfy our deepest desires with cheap substitutes. By looking at our sins we will have clues as to what we really need. The people dug cracked cisterns indicating they knew they needed water. How might our misguided attempts to fill our deepest longings be a way to find our true heart's desire in God?

The prophet brings a strong indictment against the leaders. As leaders of God's people we have a responsibility to ask, "Where is the Lord?" It is our job to interpret life's situations in light of God's reality and lead people to see how God is there for them. Only then will we be able to offer the water that truly satisfies.

Discussion Questions

Where do you see the Lord in your present situation?

What worthless things are you chasing after that diminish your own worth?

How might your sin be the very thing that can lead you to the fountain of living water?

Psalm 81:1, 10-16

¹ Sing with joy to God our strength *
and raise a loud shout to the God of Jacob.

¹⁰ I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt
and said, *

"Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it."

¹¹ And yet my people did not hear my voice, *
and Israel would not obey me.

¹² So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their
hearts, *
to follow their own devices.

¹³ Oh, that my people would listen to me! *
that Israel would walk in my ways!

¹⁴ I should soon subdue their enemies *
and turn my hand against their foes.

¹⁵ Those who hate the Lord would cringe before him,
*

and their punishment would last for ever.

¹⁶ But Israel would I feed with the finest wheat *
and satisfy him with honey from the rock.

Commentary from Louise Samuelson

In Psalm 81 a connection is made between hearing and obeying. The people do not obey because they don't listen to God's voice. Our English words obey and listen both share the same Latin root audire.

The psalmist suggests praise and remembering as ways to hear God. As we sing songs declaring who God is, and tell stories about all God has done, we will be open to hearing God's voice. We will also desire to do God's will, knowing God only wants the best for us.

God's desire is to fill God's people with good things. As we choose not to listen to God we are given over to the consequences of going it alone. As we turn back to God, our needs are met.

Discussion Questions

What are some ways you have seen God show up on your behalf in the past?

What practices help you listen to God's voice?

What good things are you missing from God because you have forgotten God's goodness?

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

¹³ Let mutual affection continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them, those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. ⁴ Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. ⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he himself has said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” ⁶ So we can say with confidence,

“The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid.
What can anyone do to me?”

⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

¹⁵ Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Commentary from Louise Samuelson

Hebrews 13 tells us how to give thanks for “a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Hebrews 12:28). By showing care for those in our communities of faith, as well as those who are strangers, we live out our gratitude for our place in God’s kingdom.

We are invited to use our imaginations to place ourselves with prisoners and those who are tortured. Rather than locking them away and forgetting about them, we are urged to enter their pain as if our own bodies were suffering with them. In God’s kingdom no one is outside of God’s concern.

We are also called to show our gratitude in how we deal with sex and money. In our temptation to meet these needs outside of God’s provision, we are reminded that God sees us and that God is with us. As we seek to care more about others and less about money we are reminded that God is always caring for us. God invites us to trust as we participate in this kingdom work.

Discussion Questions

What would it look like for you to care for strangers and those suffering in prison?

In what ways is your care for money and sex inhibiting your participation in God’s kingdom?

Luke 14:1, 7-14

14 On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely.

⁷When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. ⁸“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host, ⁹and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. ¹⁰But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. ¹¹For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

¹²He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers and sisters or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Commentary from Louise Samuelson

Luke uses a familiar wedding banquet metaphor to show us what honor looks like in God’s kingdom.

Jesus notices that the guests at the dinner assume their own privilege in choosing their place at the table. He invites them to let go of whatever it is that they feel makes them better than the others. His message is for those of us who feel we have a choice as to where we belong in the world. As we release our need to play the comparison game, and then identify with the lowly, we will be honored by God.

Jesus perfectly displayed this path of letting go of privilege in becoming human so that God could lift him up to the highest place (Philippians 2). Through this parable Jesus is inviting us to join him in this same journey of going down and being lifted up.

In the second half of this parable Jesus teaches what it looks like to use privilege to lift up others. Like God we are invited to do the same work in lifting up the humble. So in this great cycle of humility and being lifted up we participate with God in the lifting up of others.

Discussion Questions

What privileged position are you being invited to let go of?

How can you use the place God has given you to lift up those whom life has brought low?