PENTECOST 15

Proper 20 - Year C

The Rev. Vincent Caranchini *is a Chicago native who grew up in a Polish-Italian family and was attracted to ordained ministry from an early age. As an ordained Episcopal deacon, he is passionate about promoting the justice of the Gospel, which is rooted in prayer and worship and expressed through ministry and education. He has worked with various types of ministries, including retreat work, spiritual direction, education, arts, and social services. Vincent is also a tenured associate professor in the School of Art + Design at Northern Arizona University. He completed a BFA in Fine Arts at the Chicago Art Institute and an MFA at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. He has been an educator in the fine arts and design for 25 years and has worked in higher education administration. He has a strong interest in liturgical spaces and religious art. As an artist and educator, he has exhibited artwork related to sacred space and iconography in national juried and selected exhibitions. Vincent is excited to join Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church in Sedona, Arizona, as priest-in-charge beginning September 1, 2025. He completed his M.Div. at the* ***Church Divinity School of the Pacific*** *in May 2025.*

The collect this week invokes our creator to help us "not to be anxious about earthly things," while the Old Testament readings present a sequence of lamentations about the earthly sufferings experienced by the people of Israel, per Jeremiah and Psalm 79. The New Testament frames human attitudes, which often are the cause of such sufferings, when individuals and societies become inordinately focused on personal gain and the accumulation of wealth at the expense of human life. The collect's petition for help "to love things heavenly," in contrast, might be understood as a petition to reorient our values, so that they are better focused on the love of God and the love of neighbor, as a balm for the anxieties in this world.

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1

18 My joy is gone; grief is upon me;
my heart is sick.
19 Listen! The cry of the daughter of my people
from far and wide in the land:
"Is the Lord not in Zion?
Is her King not in her?"
("Why have they provoked me to anger with their
images,
with their foreign idols?")
20 "The harvest is past, the summer is ended,
and we are not saved."
21 For the brokenness of the daughter of my people I
am broken,
I mourn, and horror has seized me.

22 Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?
Why then has the health of the daughter of my people
not been restored?

9 O that my head were a spring of water
and my eyes a fountain of tears,
so that I might weep day and night
for the slain of the daughter of my people!

Commentary from Vincent Caranchini

The lamentation expressed by Jeremiah tears our hearts. Jeremiah's lament rises at the destruction of the temple and the beginning of the Babylonian exile, when everything dear to his people was torn away and devastation lay everywhere in their sight. While this firsthand witness of war, exile, and destruction might not be our immediate context, we resonate with the author's grief because our world can sometimes seem rife with devastation and the seeming abandonment of God. Yet, this text is tricky: As a prophet, Jeremiah speaks of his own grief as he cries out to God. But God is also in deep grief. God grieves the destruction of God's beloved people and grieves more deeply that their hearts had turned away, leading them into these circumstances. This challenging text can invite us to consider how our natural human tendencies, when left unchecked or unconverted, link us to participation in complex human networks that contribute to suffering.

As Christians who sit with this Hebrew text in the context of liturgy, we too want to cry out with Jeremiah, but we may want to use an inversion of his lament. We may want to use words of a Southern Gospel spiritual song based on this text, "There is a balm in Gilead!" We know, through the Old Testament and the New Testament, there is a balm, there is a hope. God is there, no matter what we might see or experience. Our God stands with us in suffering and offers life.

Discussion Questions

What might it mean to consider that God suffers when witnessing human suffering? How might we find hope in God's suffering with us?

How do we unintentionally participate in creating suffering in the world? How can our grief become an opportunity to reorient ourselves toward a life of compassion and mercy, thus making a difference in the world's suffering?

Psalm 79:1-9

[1] O God, the heathen have come into your
inheritance;
they have profaned your holy temple; *
they have made Jerusalem a heap of rubble.
[2] They have given the bodies of your servants as food
for the birds of the air, *
and the flesh of your faithful ones to the
beasts of the field.
[3] They have shed their blood like water on every side
of Jerusalem, *
and there was no one to bury them.
[4] We have become a reproach to our neighbors, *
an object of scorn and derision to those
around us.
[5] How long will you be angry, O Lord? *
will your fury blaze like fire for ever?
[6] Pour out your wrath upon the heathen who have
not known you *
and upon the kingdoms that have not called
upon your Name.
[7] For they have devoured Jacob *
and made his dwelling a ruin.
[8] Remember not our past sins;
let your compassion be swift to meet us; *
for we have been brought very low.
[9] Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your
Name; *
deliver us and forgive us our sins, for your
Name's sake.

Commentary from Vincent Caranchini

Like Jeremiah's text, Psalm 79 is a song of lament. It echoes the events of the destruction of the Temple and the devastation of the Hebrew people by foreign powers. The Psalmist cries out, "How long will you be angry, O Lord?" not unlike Jeremiah, pleading with God while trying to make sense of their circumstances. The Psalmist also calls for vengeance: "Pour out your wrath upon the heathen who have not known you." This plea may make us uncomfortable, but it helps us appreciate that the psalms, as prayer, model our ability to be completely honest with God. As Walter Brueggeman argues in his book, *Praying the Psalms*, they teach us that we can be transparent with God, expressing all our genuine feelings. We don't need to be polite or trite when speaking with the Almighty. Rather, by living fully in our lives and speaking from real life, we move into a real relationship with God. This enables the Psalmist – and us, praying alongside – to have trust when "we have been brought very low." Trusting that God's "compassion [will] be swift to meet us." Inviting us to repentance, forgiveness, and deliverance, for God's "Name's sake."

Discussion Questions

When we are down or angry with life, how comfortable are we in voicing these frustrations to God? If we are not comfortable, why might that be?

Do we trust God to handle our full humanness in honest relationships with him and one another? Or are we too polite, not allowing God into our darkness?

1 Timothy 2:1-7

2 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers,
intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for
everyone, [2] for kings and all who are in high positions,
so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all
godliness and dignity. [3] This is right and acceptable
before God our Savior, [4] who desires everyone to be
saved and to come to the knowledge of the
truth. [5] For

there is one God;
there is also one mediator between God and
humankind,
Christ Jesus, himself human,
[6] who gave himself a ransom for all

—this was attested at the right time. [7] For this I was
appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the
truth; I am not lying), a teacher of the gentiles in faith
and truth.

Commentary from Vincent Caranchini

Paul's instruction in today's Epistle calls us to pray from a perspective much broader than our own. It calls us to pray from the perspective and through the power of Christ Jesus. Paul's advice to Timothy complements his theme of Christians having the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16) and puts this awareness into the real action of prayer: "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone…. God our Savior [desires] everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Paul highlights the importance of praying for kings, rulers, political powers, and everyone! At the time of this writing, Paul's invitation to pray for kings was inviting them to pray for their persecutors. This advice is poignantly relevant for us today, where division within societies, between cultural or political parties, needs healing. The act of praying for everyone has the potential to help us see one another as Christ sees us and calls us to participate in his love for all people as the "one mediator between God and humankind."

Discussion Questions

What is it like to pray for those with whom we disagree? Might it help our empathy towards them, or perhaps help us to see them as human, like ourselves, with compassion?

When we pray, might we consider how Christ prays through us for others? Could this be part of the process that transforms us to see one another as he sees us?

Luke 16:1-13

16 Then Jesus said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. **2** So he summoned him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management because you cannot be my manager any longer.' **3** Then the manager said to himself, 'What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. **4** I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.' **5** So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' **6** He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.' **7** Then he asked another, 'And how much do you owe?' He replied, 'A hundred containers of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and make it eighty.' **8** And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly, for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. **9** And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

10 "Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much, and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. **11** If, then, you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? **12** And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? **13** No slave can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

Commentary from Vincent Caranchini

Jesus provides an important lesson about the relationship between wealth and human relationships in outlining a successful business plan by a dishonest manager in Luke's parable. Biblical commentators suggest that this is one of the most difficult parables to unravel. In contrast to the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) immediately prior, today's main character, the dishonest manager, lives in the complex real world of Greco-Roman culture, where the exchange of money built or solidified relationships. One way to consider this parable is to see that the manager's reduction of debt for those of lower economic status eased their burden and built new alliances while undermining those seeking to capitalize on their situations. In this way, the manager demonstrates how "the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light." It's a call to active vision, to use the economic realities of our time to build relationships, to ease the burden of the poor, and to invite all economic classes into the sharing of "true riches," by placing money and its use in its proper perspective.

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?

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