PENTECOST 19

Proper 24 - Year C

Jordan Wesley *is a candidate for the priesthood from the Diocese of New York and a member of the second cohort of the hybrid M.Div. program at* ***General Theological Seminary****. She studies by night and serves at a church in Astoria, Queens, on the weekend. On weekdays, she works as the chief partnerships officer for a national education non-profit, Let's Get Ready. She holds a Master of Science in Social Work and a Master of Arts in Christian Ministry, and she is an avid urban gardener, a lover of her tiny maltipoo, Luna, and the proud wife of a two-time Ironman finisher, Lew. While New York City has been home since 2011, a piece of her heart will always live in Texas with her parents, siblings, niblings, and the rest of her big, rowdy Texas crew.*

Jeremiah 31:27-34

27 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I
will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah
with the seed of humans and the seed of
animals. 28 And just as I have watched over them to
pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and
bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to
plant, says the Lord. 29 In those days they shall no
longer say:

"The parents have eaten sour grapes,
and the children's teeth are set on edge."

30 But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of the
one who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge.
31 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I
will make a new covenant with the house of Israel
and the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the
covenant that I made with their ancestors when I
took them by the hand to bring them out of the land
of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was
their husband, says the Lord. 33 But this is the
covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law
within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I
will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 No
longer shall they teach one another or say to each
other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord,
for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin
no more.

Commentary from Jordan Wesley

Very few people want to be the one to insist that an old tradition, a former way of thinking, or beloved way of life must end. Even the iconoclasts among us know that pressing for transformation often comes at great personal cost. In fact, Jeremiah's own autobiographical account (chapters 26-45) suggests that he wasn't particularly beloved for his oracles of judgment and insistence on amendment of life.

And yet, amid the isolation, pain of exile, and loss that Jeremiah and his people were living through, it would have been hard to imagine any kind of better future without letting at least some things go. The references to the Sinai covenant (v. 32) and the teachings of Deuteronomic law (vv. 33-34) reminded the ancient people in exile and even us now that this is not a text about replacing one covenant with another, but rather God's relentless willingness to make as many covenants as it takes until the people remain faithful. Though accountability and letting old idols go are required of us, God's forgiveness for each new generation stands the test of time. And this is the promise of hope that Jeremiah reminds the battered and scattered people in the text. The days are surely coming when God will help us build and plant and start anew.

Discussion Questions

How might letting go of a former thing and accepting forgiveness from God bring hope and transformation into your life today? How could this pattern bring hope and transformation into your congregation?

Psalm 119:97-104

97 Oh, how I love your law! *
all the day long it is in my mind.
98 Your commandment has made me wiser than my enemies, *
and it is always with me.
99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, *
for your decrees are my study.
100 I am wiser than the elders, *
because I observe your commandments.
101 I restrain my feet from every evil way, *
that I may keep your word.
102 I do not shrink from your judgments, *
because you yourself have taught me.
103 How sweet are your words to my taste! *
they are sweeter than honey to my mouth.
104 Through your commandments I gain understanding; *
therefore I hate every lying way.

Commentary from Jordan Wesley

Modern life does not easily lend itself to meditation on anything, much less meditation on the law of God. And the pursuit of personal happiness can be easily mistaken for the path of wisdom. Do we love and observe the commands of the news cycle and our social media feeds? How often do we settle for processed sugar when the Psalmist offers us the image of a dripping honeycomb made lovingly by bees who know the wisdom of steadily and diligently gathering the pollen needed for the fruit of their labor? This invitation to love God's law reminds us that the law of God is more than a list of dos and don'ts; it is an invitation to a way of love.

Discussion Questions

What do you find occupying your mind all day long?

How do you receive the Psalmist's invitation to God's law?

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

[14] But as for you, continue in what you have learned
and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned
it [15] and how from childhood you have known sacred
writings that are able to instruct you for salvation
through faith in Christ Jesus. [16] All scripture is
inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for
reproof, for correction, and for training in
righteousness, [17] so that the person of God may be
proficient, equipped for every good work.

4 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is
to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his
appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge
you: [2] proclaim the message; be persistent whether the
time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke,
and encourage with the utmost patience in
teaching. [3] For the time is coming when people will
not put up with sound teaching, but, having their ears
tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers
to suit their own desires [4] and will turn away from
listening to the truth and wander away to myths. [5] As
for you, be sober in everything, endure suffering, do
the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry
fully.

Commentary from Jordan Wesley

It is impossible to know exactly which texts are being referenced as scripture here. They most certainly included the Hebrew Scriptures and some of the earliest written texts that we think of as the New Testament. However, given when 2 Timothy was likely written, it is not possible that the writer would be referencing the exact iteration of what Christians now call the Bible. So, what do we make of this instruction on how to use scripture and the urgency with which the writer encourages the community to hold fast to sound doctrine?

The unity of the church has often been tested throughout history by this call to defend the truth of the gospel. Too often, we have interpreted this and passages like it to proof-text against those we disagree with in matters of faith. Or, we have been blind to how we have diluted the message of Jesus to make it appealing to our own desires. I suppose it depends on who you ask.

Considering the larger message of 2 Timothy, the admonishment here is for each of the baptized to persist in the gospel work given to them. Earlier in the text, it was stated plainly, "And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness" (2:24-25a). We have been given a gospel ministry that is rooted in the traditions and scriptures we have received, and leaders have been given a special accountability to steward these well. Our task is to remain faithful in proclaiming salvation through faith in Christ and to treat others with the same love and gentleness that we have received. The rest is God's work.

Discussion Questions

Sometimes, controversies about the right interpretation of scripture and sound doctrine can be personally painful. What might faithfulness mean when this happens? How might those in lay and ordained leadership take pastoral responsibility and accountability in these circumstances?

How are you being invited to remain persistent in proclaiming the salvation you have received?

Luke 18:1-8

18 Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to
pray always and not to lose heart. **2** He said, "In a
certain city there was a judge who neither feared God
nor had respect for people. **3** In that city there was a
widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant
me justice against my accuser.' **4** For a while he
refused, but later he said to himself, 'Though I have
no fear of God and no respect for anyone, **5** yet
because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant
her justice, so that she may not wear me out by
continually coming.' " **6** And the Lord said, "Listen to
what the unjust judge says. **7** And will not God grant
justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and
night? Will he delay long in helping them? **8** I tell you,
he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when
the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Commentary from Jordan Wesley

In an Episcopal confirmation class, you might learn, "lex orandi, lex credendi," a Latin phrase translating to "the rule of prayer [is] the rule of belief," or "how we pray is how we believe." This idea is central to our practice of common worship, reminding us that our observance of the liturgies of the Book of Common Prayer shapes our beliefs. Prayers are theologically transformative. And so, it might be appropriate to ask what belief is being shaped through the persistent prayers of the widow in Jesus' parable.

The parable is part of Jesus' answer to a question about when God's ultimate reign will come (Luke 17:20). Jesus resists and reframes the questions with riddles, irony, and parables. In stark contrast to the wicked judge, who must be forced into his duty by a defiant widow, Jesus says that God is just and nothing like this judge. He then interprets his own parable with a question. Instead of lecturing about when the end will come, Jesus admonishes them to remain persistent in prayer and wonders if they will continue to believe his proclamation recorded in Luke 4:18. Good news has come to the oppressed, and in this case, the widow. What rule of belief is shaped by this parable about prayer? In praying like the persistent widow, we see that prayer is about both our relationship with God and our relationships with one another. In prayer, we expand our ability to believe in God's just work in the world and our role as partners in that work.

Discussion Questions

In what ways has your participation in the prayers of the church shaped your own belief? How have those beliefs shaped your practice of prayer inside and outside the walls of the building?

How does this parable affirm and/or challenge your own practice of prayer?

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