

PENTECOST 16

Proper 21 - Year C

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Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15

³² The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. ² At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, ³ where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him.

⁶ Jeremiah said, "The word of the Lord came to me: ⁷ Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.' " ⁸ Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the Lord, and said to me, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself." Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord.

⁹ And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel and weighed out the silver to him, seventeen shekels of silver. ¹⁰ I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the silver on scales. ¹¹ Then I took the sealed deed of purchase containing the terms and conditions and the open copy, ¹² and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. ¹³ In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, ¹⁴ "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. ¹⁵ For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land."

Commentary from Harlowe Zefting

Jeremiah is imprisoned in Jerusalem by King Zedekiah for prophesying the fall of Jerusalem and Judah to the Babylonians, who are currently taking the land and besieging the city, along with the personal exile to Babylon of Zedekiah himself. In jail, Jeremiah is visited by his cousin and offered the sale of a field— a legal process by which to keep land within an extended family. The field in question is in Jeremiah's hometown, from which he was run out, and is likely being actively taken over by the Babylonian army. By worldly and temporal measures, it is not a good purchase for the prophet to make. However, Jeremiah stresses the Word of the Lord guiding his actions, and he purchases the field with all of the proper legal processes: weighing money, copying the deed, bringing witnesses, and preserving the deed in a jar. This impractical purchase is a prophetic act that deepens Jeremiah's prophetic words. Yes, Judah will fall to Babylon, and its people will be taken in exile, but God is still preserving the land— and people— through this hardship. Jeremiah's purchase and saving of the deed, even if he will not personally enjoy the field, attests to God's promise in v. 15: "Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land."

Discussion Questions

Have you ever followed through with an impractical act to make a point or illustrate your values and beliefs?

Do small acts of resistance in the face of difficulty bring you hope?

Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16

- ¹ He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, *
abides under the shadow of the Almighty.
- ² He shall say to the Lord,
"You are my refuge and my stronghold, *
my God in whom I put my trust."
- ³ He shall deliver you from the snare of the hunter *
and from the deadly pestilence.
- ⁴ He shall cover you with his pinions,
and you shall find refuge under his wings; *
his faithfulness shall be a shield and buckler.
- ⁵ You shall not be afraid of any terror by night, *
nor of the arrow that flies by day;
- ⁶ Of the plague that stalks in the darkness, *
nor of the sickness that lays waste at mid-day.
- ¹⁴ Because he is bound to me in love,
therefore will I deliver him; *
I will protect him, because he knows my
Name.
- ¹⁵ He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; *
I am with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and bring him to honor.
- ¹⁶ With long life will I satisfy him, *
and show him my salvation.

Commentary from Harlowe Zefting

Psalm 91 is a powerful testimony of God's refuge and steadfastness. It is commonly used in difficult circumstances and pastoral care, as the psalmist places their complete trust in God's protection. The striking imagery evokes the experiences both of being in grave fear, danger, and desperation, and of relying on God, who completely delivers and protects. God's love is strong and deep, as is the intimate divine understanding of human suffering.

Discussion Questions

What helps you when you feel frightened?

How does it feel that God knows your name and promises to answer when called upon?

1 Timothy 6:6-19

⁶Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment, ⁷for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it, ⁸but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

¹¹But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. ¹²Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. ¹⁶It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

¹⁷As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches but rather on God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, ¹⁹thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Commentary from Harlowe Zefting

This section of Paul's pastoral epistle to Timothy and his community reminds us that greed – especially greed for money – has been a longtime human struggle. The capacity of money to twist and corrupt us, leading to suffering for ourselves and those around us, is dealt with in nearly every religious tradition. Here, Paul reminds the reader that God “gives life to all things” and “provides us with everything for our enjoyment,” contrasting the ultimate provision of God with the fleeting and tempting provision of worldly riches. This letter, written to a close friend, casts Paul in the role of mentor and loving guide, rather than harsh spiritual rule-setter. Even if pseudepigraphical, this letter's author sincerely wants the best for Timothy and other early Jesus-followers, directing them to the lasting contentment that comes from deep faith in God.

Discussion Questions

Have you ever felt money sway your values or intentions? Have you ever placed hope in material possessions but been let down when fortune changes?

Shunning worldly temptations is difficult. How have you been able to turn away from temptation and toward God? How does that feel?

Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹ “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was being tormented, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames.’ ²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things and Lazarus in like manner evil things, but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶ Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ ²⁷ He said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ ³⁰ He said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ ³¹ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’ ”

Commentary from Harlowe Zefting

The Gospel lesson includes another famous Christian exhortation against selfishness in wealth, this time in the form of a parable. This passage vividly illustrates the sayings of Paul in Timothy and the Beatitudes/Woes that the rich “have received [their] consolation” (Lk 6:24). Wealth certainly does *feel* good; the rich man feasts every day and has lovely clothes, but it is fleeting in this life, and distracts from eternal contentment with God. This parable also features the specific dangers of greed and extreme wealth: the rich man is separated from others by a huge chasm, and the still-living

rich brothers will not be convinced to change their ways even if someone rises from the dead.

The great chasm fixed between Abraham and Hades describes the distance between afterlife locales, but it also figuratively describes the vast wealth disparity that existed in Jesus’ time – a disparity that we are only too familiar with today. We see the increasing wealth of multi-billionaires alongside the increasing poverty and starvation of people around the world. Perhaps it was the great chasm that the rich man’s resources created that prevented him from seeing Lazarus in life.

Abraham’s comment that the rich brothers will not be convinced to share their wealth even if someone rises from the dead is clear foreshadowing of Christ’s resurrection. It could also have been a comment on the situations faced by early Jesus-followers in their non-believer communities, where their testimony of Christ’s rising from the dead might have been shunned, since several New Testament texts deal with the capacity of money to distract from faith in God.

Discussion Questions

How have you experienced economic disparity?
Is it difficult to connect across class differences?
Have you done anything to narrow the chasm?

What can help us listen to Moses and the prophets? How does believing in Christ’s resurrection from the dead influence how you treat people and material possessions in this life?