

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 22 – Year B

RCL Readings¹ – Genesis 2:18-24; Psalm 8; Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12; Mark 10:2-16

ACNA Readings – Genesis 2:18-24; Psalm 8; Hebrews 2:1-18; Mark 10:2-16

Seasonal Introduction. The Christian calendar revolves around two principal feasts: Christmas (involving Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany) and Easter (involving Lent, Easter, and Pentecost). Then there is a large section in the middle called ordinary time. This season often focuses on the growth of the Church, ending in a season known as Kingdomtide which concludes with the feast of Christ the king. During this time we read and hear the bulk of the teachings of Jesus in relation to the kingdom of heaven and how we are called to live as disciples of the Messiah.

Memorial Collect.² "O God of all comfort, who in Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, proclaimed good news to the poor, bound up the broken-hearted, and set the captives free: We remember before You this day all who were affected by the violence of October 7, and we ask You to heal the wounded, comfort those who mourn, and bring justice and peace to the land of Israel. Look with mercy upon the peoples of the Middle East, that, in Your great compassion, the light of Christ may shine in the darkness and bring hope to every nation."

Common Theme. Children prominently feature in the readings this week, either directly or tangentially. Children are precious to God. From the beginning, God created a partnership between Adam and Eve that should have resulted in the best place to raise children without the pain and sorrow of divorce and unfaithfulness towards God and one other. Children are a blessing of God but they can also bless God if they are brought up in the way they should go.

Hebraic Context. In the period leading up to the Maccabean revolt, through the Hasmonean rule, and King Herod's rule there were five recognized pairs of Scriptural scholars who, along with the explosion of Jewish literature that, absurdly, a few Christian scholars call the "400 Silent

¹ Alternate RCL Readings: Job 1:1, 2:1-10; Psalm 26

² In light of the events in the Middle East over the last year, the following Collect is going to be used in many Anglican churches around the world this coming Sunday, the Sunday closest to October 7th. The Collect was written by a representative of the ACNA Archbishop following a visit to Israel.

On October 7th, 2023 terrorists swarmed across the border between Gaza and Israel and indiscriminately murdered over a 1,000 men, women, and children. This included Israeli citizens, both Jewish and Arab civilians, as well as foreign workers from Thailand and Nepal. Hundreds of civilians (many Jewish but also some Arab Bedouin Israelis) were also kidnapped and many have remained in captivity. Since then, a bitter war has waged between Israel and Hamas with additional rockets shot daily from Hezbollah and the imminent threat of war between Israel and Hezbollah.

Please join with us in prayer: not for our own political desires but for God's comfort to come on all who have been affected and that mercy would prevail and that God's light would shine where we only see despair and darkness.

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 22 – Year B

Years”,³ formed much of Jewish thought in the 1st centuries. The final scholarly pair (תנאים) were Hillel and Shammai.⁴ These two scholars opposed each other on several topics and the reasoning for their respective arguments formed two schools of thought called the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai.

Opposition in argument, however, was not viewed in a negative light in first century Jewish thought. In fact, arguments over the interpretation of Scripture were often considered incredibly beneficial.⁵ In general, Shammai was often viewed as being stricter in interpretation while Hillel was considered to be more lenient in matters of Jewish Law.⁶

When it came to matters of divorce Shammai took a more literal view of the Mosaic injunction that divorce was only permissible in cases of marital infidelity. Both Shammai and Hillel argued from Deuteronomy 24:1, “When a man take a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in

³ While the Protestant view on Scripture would state that no new Scripture was written between the time of Malachi and the New Testament, God certainly did not remain aloof for 400 years and do nothing—just as He isn't doing nothing today. Several of the apocryphal books are either considered to be Scriptural (by some) or, at the least, useful for learning by many. Regardless of the difficult question of the Canon of Scripture, Jewish sources mention that God was constantly speaking to His people, sending angels to guide and minister to them, and acting in both redemption and judgment.

God's interaction with people like Anna, the prophetess of the tribe of Asher, or Simeon is not recorded in the Bible except as something that happened years and decades before the birth of John and Jesus. Perhaps God's interaction with them, Zechariah, and Mary should not be seen as simply the 400 years of God's silence coming to an end but the continuation of God's redemptive work.

⁴ Shammai and Hillel lived during the reign of King Herod the Great and his sons. But they feature prominently in the Mishnah in the second and third centuries.

⁵ *Pirkei Avot* states, “Every dispute that is for the sake of Heaven, will in the end endure; but one that is not for the sake of Heaven, will not endure. Which is the controversy that is for the sake of Heaven? Such was the controversy of Hillel and Shammai. And which is the controversy that is not for the sake of Heaven? Such was the controversy of Korah and all his congregation.” (*Pirkei Avot* 5.17) This might explain why Jesus had such a good relationship with many of the Pharisees.

Our modern, Protestant, view of Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees is often very negative. This is despite the fact that Jesus ate with Pharisees, had long conversations with Pharisees, and was even warned by Pharisees about a plot to kill Him. However, the Protestant reformation did not have such a positive outlook on theological argument as, rather than provoke growth and unity, the Protestant and Catholic arguments erupted into violence, martyrdom, and even war.

Jesus did have arguments with Pharisees and even condemned some of their actions (although rarely their actual teaching). Some of the Pharisees, particularly in Jerusalem where they were influenced by power and greed, certainly opposed Jesus—but not all of them. In fact, several of them listened to Jesus' teaching during His lifetime and many followed Jesus after His death and resurrection.

⁶ Modern Judaism has the tendency to follow the less stricter Hillel school in relation to matters of Halacha, that is, how you put the Bible into practice.

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 22 – Year B

his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house,...” but there was a question of what indecency (עֲרוֹת דְּבַר *ervat davar*) meant. Shammai understood ערות (indecency, nakedness, or unclean thing) to exclusively mean adultery. In contrast, Hillel was more liberal with his interpretation and interpreted ערות as anything that the husband found offensive.⁷

Usually in the gospels we find that Jesus sided with Hillel in terms of not making the Torah too burdensome for the people. However, in the issue of divorce Jesus took the stricter tone of the school of Shammai.

Genesis 2:18-24. “And God saw that it was good.” Before the rebellion of man, all that God made was good except one thing—“It is not good that the man should be alone.” Genesis 2:18 is the first time in the Bible that God looked and saw something that was not good. What was this thing? Being alone.

God Himself was never alone. There has always been the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Community is not simply a nice thing to improve our chances of survival and prevent loneliness while improving our psyche, living in community is good. A man and woman should cleave to each other—“they shall become one flesh”.

Moses only gave us one sentence (Genesis 2:7) regarding the physical creation of man, but the search for someone fit to be with man—something that would take a situation that was not good and make it good—took a full paragraph (Genesis 2:18-23). What sort of woman did God make for man? First, she, like Adam, was made in the image of God. Second, she was to be a helper. But she was also supposed to be a helper opposite to him.⁸

⁷ The vast majority of the time ערות is used, it refers to someone's nakedness. But the closest use of the word, in Deuteronomy 23:12-14, indicates it might be something generally offensive. In this interpretation, Hillel declared that even a burnt meal could be considered offensive and, thus, be a cause for divorce.

⁸ Where Adam was male, Eve would be female. But the Hebrew is even more interesting and nuanced. The phrase is עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ *ezer k'negdo*, which is “a helper that is opposite him”. The word נֶגֶד *neged* means in front of or opposite—it is even used for someone in opposition. God gave man dominion over the fish, birds, livestock and everything that creeps on the land—but none of these would be good for Adam. Instead, it was someone man did not have dominion over (someone made in the image of God even as he was) that would be good for Adam.

Man and woman aren't the only time or place where we see God make a community rather than individuals. In Hebrews 10:25, we aren't to neglect meeting together. Again, being alone is not good. But the previous verse says that we are to “stir up one another to love and good works...” This sounds like a great thing to do. However, the word is παροξυσμὸν (what we get the medical term paroxysm from). The only other time that is used in the Scripture is in Acts 15:39, “And there arose a sharp disagreement.”

Sermon Notes from the Church’s Ministry Among Jewish People
Proper 22 – Year B

Psalm 8.⁹ In a world where gods were in every land David specified that he spoke of the God of creation from Genesis and of Moses from Exodus.¹⁰ God’s majesty and power is proclaimed by both the heavens and humans. In particular, it is proclaimed by the smallest of humans—the infants. David wrote that it was from the mouths of children that strength was established.¹¹

Disagreement and opposition regarding a matter is not always a bad thing, (see Footnote 5). It should often lead us closer to the kingdom of heaven, not further from it. Likewise, a woman is to be a helper opposite her husband—not to harm nor to tear down, but to build up to love and good works. Our partner’s helpful opposition can be an amazing benefit to the marriage and can save many couples from impending disasters—it is not always the opposite of submission or love.

⁹ The Psalms of David with a historical superscript are almost always from a place of pain, sorrow, and fear. Of the 13 historical Psalms of David all but one of them involved someone trying to harm David while the final one involved David harming another that required repentance. However, 73 Psalms were attributed to David, either as a poem he wrote or one that he commissioned (tradition includes even more Psalms as belonging to David, including two Psalms of David shared in the New Testament that weren’t attributed to him in the actual Scriptures).

While David suffered from the persecution of others, the difficulties of his life as both a shepherd and a king, and his own sin, he also learned to praise and worship God. Psalm 8 is largely free of his sorrows and instead focused on the majesty of God, praising the creator of the universe who still cares for man.

¹⁰ David began the psalm using the Name of God יהוה YHWH, which is translated into English as LORD (using all capitals). Some commentaries call this the “covenantal name of God”. However, it is more than just a simple nomenclature for an aspect of God. יהוה is an actual name, regardless of what covenant is being talked about—including the New Covenant. Names are important, as they give us identity and ground us in history, time, and place.

David both started and concluded his song with: “How majestic is your name in all the earth!” Today the Jewish people call God “HaShem”, which means “the Name” to denote that they refer to God’s private name but it is so holy they will not dare pronounce it. When Moses asked God for God’s name in Exodus 3:13-14, God did not answer the question directly. He responded instead by calling Himself by a special aspect of His character, אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה *eheyeh asher eheyeh*, which can be translated I am what I am or I will be what I will be (the word אֶהְיֶה *eheyeh* means ‘to be’, but in biblical Hebrew, it is not always clear as to which tense is specified). God’s name is rooted in the verb “to be”. God was saying to Moses that He “is” and that He caused all things to be.

Our names can tell other people something about who we are and where we might come from. God has a name and that name is incredibly special, unique, and mysterious. Eventually, God did give His name to Moses in Exodus 6:3. God’s name is יהוה—even if its meaning and pronunciation are elusive (whole books have been written about this name of God, and yet, in the end, we must recognize we don’t understand it fully and it is undefinable). The LORD is not like any other god.

¹¹ The psalm uses two words for child, one is תינוק *tinok* which comes from the verb לינוק *linook*, to suck or to nurse as that is what infants usually do. One of the names of the Lord is El Shaddai which is so often translated as “Almighty” when it literally means “God is my breast”. Why would God be given this name? Because, as His children, we need to draw in from Him all His goodness, strength, wisdom, and

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 22 – Year B

What seems to impress David in this psalm is not only how wonderful and powerful God is, but that in all His majestic splendour, God is so mindful of mere mortals. David is amazed that the eternal God would give mankind glory and honour. God took delight in leaving heaven and came to earth to fellowship with Adam in the Garden in the cool of the evening. God chose to journey with his people in the wilderness towards Canaan every day, even when they rejected Him. The creator of the universe chose to humble himself and took the form of man to redeem the world. He is present in both good times and through the bad, through trials and sufferings and joy. Though He is so great above all things as the one we look up and merely see the work of His fingers, He too looks down and listens to men. Which is a comforting thought indeed.

Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12.^{12 13} For the author of Hebrews the Psalms all point to the Messiah and the only way to truly understand the Psalms is through the Messiah. Hebrews overflows with writing about the Messiah, with Jesus being described as superior in all things. At the beginning of the epistle, Jesus was described as the “appointed the heir of all things” and “superior to angels”. Then, in Hebrews 2, the author quoted Psalm 8 to describe how Jesus in His humanity was made, for a little while, “a little lower than the angels” only to reclaim His honour and glory through suffering.

His suffering had a reason and a purpose. Hebrews declares, “It was fitting that He,... should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.”¹⁴ Trials, tribulation and suffering are part of our life and we all will one day die. However, truly death was defeated through Jesus who suffered and died even as His brothers, the children of Israel, suffered and died. But Jesus was also exalted through His own suffering. The suffering of Jesus became an invitation into a family, the family of God. But as Jesus suffered as a righteous man on earth, we too may suffer. This suffering, as difficult, horrible, and seemingly unbearable as it is, may not be meaningless either. Jesus brought life to the world through His own suffering.

understanding. Even as adults we consider ourselves as children of God and we have no more strength than what God has given us than we did as an infant. In recognizing our strength in God, a firm foundation is laid from which we can respond with praise and adoration at the majesty, power, and goodness of God.

¹² ACNA includes 2:1-18

¹³ The author of Hebrews is unknown. However, they were extremely knowledgeable in the Hebrew Scriptures (particularly the Greek translation), early Hellenistic Jewish literature, and Jewish traditions. They particularly made great use of quotations from the books of Psalms to support the prophetic messianic claims of Jesus. While some of the quotes may seem to be taken out of context, even a cursory understanding of Hebraic thought and writings of the 1st Century would show that the author of Hebrews is using a common approach to teaching with these quotes—one of interpretive flexibility.

¹⁴ Suffering and redemption were commonly thought to be intertwined, as in II and IV Maccabees, “Make my blood their purification, and take my life in exchange for theirs.”

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 22 – Year B

Mark 10:2-16. On the way to Jerusalem, the crowds gathered around Jesus and, as was His custom, He taught them.¹⁵ The Pharisees engaged Jesus on the issue of divorce—which was a hot topic at the time. There were two principal views on the subject: one school followed the teachings of Hillel and the other, less popular school, followed the stricter teachings of Shammai.

The Torah gave instructions for a legal divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1. Moses wrote that divorce can be granted should the man find something 'unclean or indecent' in his wife. A rabbinic debate ensued over the nature, meaning and constitution of indecency.¹⁶ Mark only recorded part of the question, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" but Matthew provided the entire question, "It is lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause." The question everyone at that time would have heard was, "Do you follow the House of Hillel or the House of Shammai regarding divorce?" Or, on what lawful grounds can a man bring a divorce certificate to his wife?¹⁷

Moses, in Deuteronomy, did not give commandments regarding how to divorce (let alone commandments that a man and woman should get a divorce), only that if the divorced couple remarried someone else, they were not to remarry each other after a second divorce. Jesus reflected this teaching in Matthew 5:31-32.¹⁸ Divorce is not the "unforgivable sin", but it is far from the ideal and was not the original plan of creation. Jesus quoted Genesis, siding with the school of Shammai in this case, to highlight the ideal example of marriage.¹⁹

¹⁵ Jesus had taken some time to teach only His disciples as He was going to His death in Jerusalem and they would need to remember what He taught them. But as He reentered the public realm Jesus returned to His normal interaction with the crowds and other teachers in the land.

¹⁶ See Hebraic Context

¹⁷ The certificate of divorce is simply called a *ṣal ghet* in Hebrew. The modern form of the *ghet* document reflects its historic foundations from Deuteronomy 24 and its interpretations in the world of the 1st Century as it is a 12 line document in Aramaic. It should be presented in a rabbinic court by the man to the woman, although the woman can refuse to accept the document.

¹⁸ Jesus' agreement with Shammai was made clear in Matthew 5:31-32 and Mark 10:10-12 as He specified that only the case of adultery—by man or by woman—allowed for divorce and remarriage. Paul adds, in I Corinthians 7:15, that if the spouse is abandoned by their unsaved partner they are not constrained. Again, as with Moses, this is not permission to abandon your spouse in divorce—only to allow them to leave if they have already done so.

God also delights in life and telling someone to remain in a life-threatening position (with the exception of idolatry, adultery, and murder) goes against the principles of Scripture. However, leaving a life-threatening position does not automatically lead to adultery, although we should be careful not to give advice to do so in the future.

¹⁹ Jesus often sided with Hillel rather than Shammai, not putting too great a burden on the people. However, it was permitted, and even expected, that students of Scripture would disagree with each other on the active interpretation of Scripture and not pick one side simply because they had previously agreed or disagreed with a scholar on a different matter.

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 22 – Year B

The original purpose for the creation of male and female was for us to be together and not separated. All relationships can get very complicated, marriage no less so. This does not detract from the ideal of marriage and divorce as presented by Jesus. Marriage is a sacramental act made with vows before the Almighty and Holy God. Unfortunately, divorce is part of our fallen state as we turn from God's ideals. We, like with Jesus and the woman at the well, may not be called to condemn those who are divorced but we should grieve with them as they suffer through divorce—even as we should seek to hold fast to our vows of sacred marriage.

Following this difficult teaching, as Jesus and the disciples were resting and discussing such a real and practical doctrine for their day and age (as well as our own), children were brought to Jesus. The disciples, perhaps wanting to continue in their profound discussion on practical theology, were annoyed at this interruption. But, as annoyed as the disciples were with the interruption, Jesus found the children to be incredibly important and so rebuked His disciples.

Theological discussions are great, Jesus regularly taught and argued on topics that were important in His time. But there is something about the faith of a child. How do you receive the kingdom of God like a child? The text does not elaborate, but generally speaking, children are teachable, they ask lots of questions, they see the world with a little more innocence than we adults do, and when they are told that something is a good thing to do they simply do it.²⁰ It is, of course, a generalization but children have a less complicated acceptance of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus declared the value and blessing of family and the gift that children are to the world. A world without children is a world without a future.

Hebraic Perspective. Moses, in his final oration to the people of Israel, gave the greatest commandment of all, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." These words of Torah were to be written on the hearts of Israel. But it wasn't supposed to stay there. Moses followed these statements up by telling them "You shall teach them diligently to your children." Faith and our love towards God is not taught by the priests nor the rabbis—it was to be taught by the family. Children can watch their families and learn from them to see the truth and faith of their parents from the time the sun rises until after it sets—assuming that their parents act in truth and are faithful to God.

Children are important in the Jewish tradition (because they are important to God). Many Jewish families all over the world hold to the custom to bless their children on the evening of the Sabbath, Friday night, and on holidays such as Passover and Sukkot. Boys are blessed with the desire that they would be like the biblical brothers Ephraim and Manasseh while the girls are

²⁰ Anecdotally, how often have you heard adults discussing welfare and the best way to serve the homeless or elderly. Meanwhile, a young child may well simply walk over and share what they have because they are able to help.

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 22 – Year B

blessed to be like the matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.²¹ The parents often add a special encouragement or reminder of their love and support after each blessing.

Ephraim and Manasseh are the sons of Joseph who were grafted in as full brothers alongside the other sons of Israel. Unlike the other children of Jacob, the Scriptures did not record there being any family strife between Ephraim and Manasseh and so the blessing is seen as a blessing of peace, harmony, and inclusion.²² The blessing for the girls is of four matriarchs who overcame serious issues of barrenness, a nomadic life, or even rejection. The concepts of graceful endurance and the strength to overcome adversity along with financial and physical support for the husband and family are embraced in this blessing. Women of the Bible do great things and the prayer looks forward to the young daughters to grow to be mighty women of God.

²¹ The blessing for male children comes directly from Genesis 48:20, "By you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying, 'God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh.'" No such commanded blessing is in the Bible for the blessing of daughters and so the blessing used today was only made into its current formula around the 17th century. However, that doesn't mean that daughters weren't blessed along with the sons. Ecclesiasticus 3:9 includes all children, "For a father's blessing strengthens the houses of the children (ΤΕΚΝΩΝ)..."

²² There is often contention between brothers in the Scriptures. The first tension between brothers occurred right at the beginning with the murder of Abel by Cain. Bitterness and hatred are common attributes between people who should have love and peace. But strife between brothers, between husbands and wives, and between God and man is not natural and we should actively strive for God's peace and the love that God calls us to.