

## Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 25 – Year B

**RCL Readings**<sup>1</sup> – Jeremiah 31:7-9; Psalm 126; Hebrews 7:23-28; Mark 10:46-52

**ACNA Readings** – Isaiah 59:9-20; Psalm 13; Hebrews 5:11-6:12; Mark 10:46-52

**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 Kingdome tide 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.

**Common Theme.** The texts for this week focus on restoration. Restoration can be both physical and spiritual. Restoration can come after repentance or persistence. But God desires to restore His relationship with His people—as our God, our Creator, our King, and our Father.

**Hebraic Context.** Restoration is a profound theme running throughout the Scriptures. It refers to the act of renewing or bringing back something to its original state or position. Restoration occurs at multiple levels, including national, individual, and interpersonal restoration. Genesis began by describing the fall of creation in which something so beautiful and perfect went horribly wrong. And so, in the opening pages of the Scriptures we also can find the hope of restoration taking shape, the return to Eden if you will.

In the Hebrew language, restoration is usually represented by several words, שׁוּב (*shuv*),<sup>2</sup> שִׁקּוּם (*shikoom*),<sup>3</sup> and הִזָּרָה (*hazara*). These words carry the sense of returning or turning back, often in connection with repentance, and occurs at both the national and individual levels.

Stories of national restoration include the events following the flood of Noah where humanity is restored to a devastated earth,<sup>4</sup> the return of the exiles from captivity in Babylon and the calling of Israel (as a light to the nations) to restore the knowledge of God to the world culminating in the hoped for messianic age. But it's not always these grand, sweeping events. Solomon, in his

---

<sup>1</sup> Job 42:1-6, 10-17; Psalm 34:1-8, 19-22

<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew Scriptures usually prefer using שׁוּב *shuv* to portray restoration through repentance. While restoration is usually seen as something that is positive in the Bible, the first use of the word שׁוּב *shuv* in the context of returning is Genesis 3:19 when Adam is told by God he will return to the earth from whence he came. There the nuance might seem negative as it occurs in the context of judgment although God thought it preferable to the alternative as seen in Genesis 3:22.

<sup>3</sup> In an interesting word connection, when the tax collector Zacchaeus climbs a tree in Jericho so he can see Jesus he does so by climbing a sycamore. The word for sycamore is שִׁקְמָה *shikma* which is also the word for restore. In the gospel account in Luke 19:1-10 Zacchaeus is restored in multiple ways through his encounter with Jesus: to his faith, his community, to God, and to honourable conduct.

<sup>4</sup> More than even a national restoration, God makes a promise not only to Noah and his descendants but also to the animals in Genesis 9:9-10, as He would again in Hosea 2:18. Paul also points towards a restoration of nature in Romans 8:21.

## Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 25 – Year B

prayer of dedication of the Temple, spoke of the repentance of both the servant of God and of God's people Israel. God would hear them, forgive, and restore them by returning them to the land God gave to their fathers.

On an individual level, the tragic figure of Job was materially restored to family and fortune (Job 42:10)<sup>5</sup> while David spoke of being spiritually restored in his soul and in the joy of his salvation in the psalms (Psalm 51:12, Psalm 23:3). Restoration is more than simply fixing something that is broken, it conveys the sense of renewal.

In our readings this week, Jeremiah announced the hope of national restoration (which will coincide together as a physical return to the land of Israel and a spiritual return to God). The Psalmist also reminded the worshippers of the mercy and faithfulness of the Lord in restoring Israel to the land where they can go to Jerusalem in pilgrimage and be with the living God. And the gospel reading will demonstrate how longed for restoration can be individual and deeply personal as well as physical and spiritual.

**Jeremiah 31:7-9.**<sup>6</sup> God called for His people to sing with gladness, to shout aloud and praise Him. They were to ask God to save the remnant of His people. In turn, God declared through Jeremiah that He would answer and would bring them back. Exile would not be the final fate of the people of God—there would be restoration. But it hadn't happened yet even as they were to "sing aloud with gladness". This seems backwards. Unless, of course, the remnant of Israel were able to see God's previous faithfulness and understand that His promises would be kept.

No matter how far the people had wandered from the Land, physically separated through the exile because they had wandered spiritually from God, they would one day return. They might come with weeping, with a spirit of contrition and repentance, but God would even bring the weakest back to the land.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> While we often think of restoration, since it's so closely related to repentance and forgiveness, as being incredibly spiritual, the Scriptures continuously point towards a very physical restoration as well. Rather than separating the spiritual and physical, the restoration often is both physical and spiritual.

<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah was a prophet and priest who lived in Anatot, a Levitical city near Jerusalem prior to the Babylonian conquest and exile. He saw and was told what was coming upon Israel. He knew that political alliances would not save Israel from the looming threat of Babylon but he was constantly ignored and his message was rejected. He became known as the weeping prophet because of his lament over Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. However, Jeremiah 30:1-33:26 is sometimes referred to as the Book of Consolation as Jeremiah prophesied that Israel would be restored as a people in the land and would join Judah in worship.

<sup>7</sup> The word for return in Jeremiah 31:8, יָשׁוּב (yeshuvu), is intricately connected with repentance throughout the Scriptures. Ezra 10:1 and Nehemiah 8:9 both show the returned remnant of Israel that returned to the land weeping as they also returned in obedience to God.

## Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 25 – Year B

While God was the author of exile through judgment on Israel, He would also be the shepherd who would lead and guide His people so they will “not stumble” again. He will do this because of the intimate relationship that He has with Israel. God is Israel’s King, majestic and powerful, but He is also their Father.<sup>8</sup>

**Psalm 126.**<sup>9</sup> The first verse seems to reflect back on the time when the Lord brought His people back from Babylon under Ezra and Nehemiah.<sup>10</sup> The expression “the LORD restored the fortunes” as seen in the opening verse, can refer to national fortunes, as it does in the context of the psalm, “When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion”, or Psalm 14:7, “When the LORD restored the fortunes of His people”. But the term can also be applied individually. For example, the same expression is used in the case of Job, where the Lord restored the fortunes of Job (Job 42:10).

As the pilgrims neared Jerusalem they could rejoice that “the LORD has done great things for us.” In context, the nations declaring that “The LORD has done great things for them” is precisely opposite of what the nations would say when Israel was taken into captivity.<sup>11</sup> So too would the restoration of Zion’s fortune be precisely the opposite of their exile. There are times for weeping, even as there are times for repentance.<sup>12</sup> But God’s mercy and restoration should bring great joy, for God is with His people. The parallel switch from “them” to “us” also allowed the worshipper, at any point in history, to participate as one of those redeemed by God.<sup>13</sup> The

---

<sup>8</sup> Israel is called Ephraim in many places in Scripture. Ephraim was one of the stronger tribes in the north in antiquity and served as a synonym for the northern kingdom with the first two kings of Israel being Ephraimites. The Tabernacle was also located in Shiloh, in the territory of Ephraim.

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 126 is one of the 15 psalms known as the Songs of Ascent. The tradition has become that these psalms form part of Jewish liturgy used during the three pilgrim festivals of the Lord. We can imagine that this psalm was on the lips of many pilgrims as they made their way towards Jerusalem at the time of Jesus.

<sup>10</sup> No author of Psalm 126 is mentioned, simply that it is a Psalm of Ascent. However, Ezra would have seen the people who returned to Jerusalem both rejoicing and weeping (Ezra 3:13, 10:1) and some scholars suggest he composed Psalm 126.

<sup>11</sup> See Deuteronomy 29:18-38, as seen also in Jeremiah 22:8-9. God’s interaction with Israel wasn’t only for Israel to enjoy or bear—it always served as a visible testimony to the nations as well. Israel’s history—their moments of waywardness, divine correction, and eventual restoration—reveals the character of God. Whether in times of discipline or restoration, the nations bear witness to the justice, forgiveness, and mercy inherent in God’s dealings with His people.

<sup>12</sup> While weeping doesn’t always lead to repentance, it may be hard to repent if there is no weeping.

<sup>13</sup> Psalm 126 made several grammatical changes throughout the song. While the remnant of Israel returned to Jerusalem weeping and rejoicing, it has been sung for over two-thousand years, many of whom weren’t personally returning from exile. The grammatical change in Psalm 126:3-4 allowed all the worshippers who were going up to Jerusalem to rejoice as their forefathers rejoiced when they returned to Jerusalem after the exile. They were to rejoice in God’s salvation as if God had redeemed them—even as God still redeems His people.

## Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 25 – Year B

worshiper chanting the psalm could proclaim himself as part of the sacred history in which God has been working in, for, and through His people. The past becomes, in some way, part of the present.

**Hebrew 7:23-28.** The Epistle of Hebrews continuously stressed the greatness and superiority of the priesthood of Jesus over that of the Levitical priesthood.<sup>14</sup> But, while Jesus interceded for His disciples and the people of Israel during His time on earth, He did not act as a priest beyond that of any other Israelite while on earth.<sup>15</sup> Rather, it seems that it was after His resurrection and ascension that Jesus took the role of High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7 is, essentially, a *midrash* on Psalm 110:4, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”<sup>16</sup> This was juxtaposed with the Levites who, like everyone else, all died—for that is

---

However, the psalms are also a great source for prophecy and many psalms are used as proof texts in the New Testament for the life, work and messiahship of Jesus. After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples, teaching them that everything was written about Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms... (Luke 24:44). This is particularly evident in the Epistle of Hebrews where the Psalms are quoted as a major source for the messiahship of Jesus.

Psalm 126 is written in the plural form except the last verse which switches the verbs to masculine singular. Grammatical changes, such as this, always elicited the question, “why?”. (Exodus 19:1-2 is an excellent illustration of a grammatical change that is picked up on by early Jewish scholars, including Luke in Acts 2:1)

Who was this person who would go out weeping but with seeds to sow? Who was it that would return with a full harvest accompanied with shouts of joy? Could it not be the Messiah? The one who died to save many?

<sup>14</sup> This should not be taken as an implication that the Levitical priesthood, though flawed by sinful men, was a bad thing. Jesus, God incarnate, is superior as an Apostle of God to Peter or Paul even though both, along with the other Apostles, were beloved by God and commanded by God to go out and make disciples.

<sup>15</sup> As a descendant of David, of the tribe of Judah, Jesus could not be a Levitical priest seeing as a requirement to be a Levitical priest was that one was a Levite.

<sup>16</sup> A midrash is a Jewish form of commentary or exegesis on a passage or verse of scripture to expand our understanding, sometimes employing word play, allegory, or stories. For instance, one of the textual interpretations the author of Hebrews used was to suggest that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham and Levi because Abraham paid tithes to him.

## Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 25 – Year B

the end of man.<sup>17</sup> The Levitical priesthood endured constant changes, with inconsistency as some priests were better or worse than those who came before and after them.

By the time of Jesus, the Temple system had become quite corrupt. The office of the high priest was no longer a position held until death, as it should have been according to the Torah, but was bought and sold as a political role and in political games. In contrast, Jesus has an unchangeable priesthood as He endures forever. His permanent status and role as high priest makes Jesus our permanent intercessor, and He is able to save “to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him.” The redemption and salvation offered by Jesus the Messiah is as unchanging as He is.

---

<sup>17</sup> *Sanhedrin* 90b.2 used Numbers 18:28 to proclaim that the resurrection of the dead was already promised in the Torah. The people were to give an offering (תרומת, *terumat*) to Aaron and his descendants. Aaron and his descendants, in return, were to eat the offerings in a “most holy place”. However, since Aaron would not enter the land of Israel to receive these offerings with his descendants then Aaron must be raised from the dead to live forever, partaking of the offerings presented.

Certainly God is the God of the living: of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (as well as Aaron). But in Luke 16:19-31, Abraham did not intercede on behalf of the living even though, while he lived on earth, he had interceded on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is possible that we will do things in the world to come as we do now—such as Jeremiah 33:18, when Levitical priests will offer burnt offerings and grain offerings forever (just as *Sanhedrin* 90b.2 hints at). Jesus, on the other hand, has already been resurrected bodily from the dead and shall live forever (even as He always has lived). He already intercedes on our behalf and does so now, when we need it most.

## Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 25 – Year B

**Mark 10:46-52.** In His final pilgrimage to Jerusalem before His death, Jesus travelled down the Jordan valley, stopping at Jericho.<sup>18</sup> It was in this very diverse<sup>19</sup> and important city that Jesus met with some very interesting people such as Zacchaeus and Bartimaeus. Jesus, with His disciples and a large crowd, passed by a blind man who called out loudly for mercy. While everyone else told the man to be quiet, even to the point of scolding the man, Jesus stopped and engaged with him.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Jericho was a very important city in Roman Israel. Pliny the Elder briefly mentioned its wealth in *The Natural History* book 5, *Judaea* and both Herod the Great and Cleopatra VII desired the wealth of Jericho (Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* 15.4.2 and *Wars of the Jews* 1.361-363). This is probably why Zaccaeus was posted in Jericho. Both the Hasmonians and Herod built magnificent royal winter palaces in Jericho.

However, Jericho wasn't only important economically. Many of the rich (and perhaps corrupt, according to *Mishnah Pesachim* 4.8) priests also lived in Jericho (as compared to the Dead Sea community who lived in the much poorer region to the south) as documented by both Josephus and Strabo and possibly from as early as the time of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 3:1-2). It was also the final stop for many pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem.

While pilgrims coming from the diaspora might travel by ship to Jaffa or Caesarea (such as Paul's pilgrimage for Shavuot) or along the Sinai from Egypt to Gaza (such as the Ethiopian Eunuch and the many Jewish people living in Alexandria and Egypt) before passing across land to Jerusalem, Galileans most often travelled down the Rift Valley. The Rift Valley, which includes the Beqaa valley through Lebanon, the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River down to the Dead Sea (before continuing all the way through Eastern Africa), was a relatively easy way to travel while avoiding the Samaritans who lived between the Galilee and Jerusalem.

But that isn't to say that travelling this way wasn't dangerous. It is likely that every pilgrim travelling this road would have stayed overnight in Jericho as it is a long, hard, and dangerous final day's journey from Jericho to Jerusalem due to the extreme heat, ascent, and bandits.

<sup>19</sup> Not only did the Priests live in Jericho along with visiting royalty, Strabo (*Geography* 16.2.34) spoke towards Egyptians, Arabians, and Phoenicians also being present in Jericho. Each of these groups, along with the Nabataeans, were famous for their economic and trade power or, in the case of the Egyptians, Cleopatra's personal interest in Jericho as an economically successful city.

<sup>20</sup> The healing of Bartimaeus was recorded in all the Synoptic Gospels. Matthew mentioned two men who were healed while only Mark actually mentioned Bartimaeus' name. Because of the particular details added or omitted in each of the texts, Saint Augustine in *The Harmony of the Gospels* 2.65.125 believed that Bartimaeus must have been someone who once was quite prosperous and notorious. His wretchedness at not only losing his eyesight but also his fortune—having to beg—would have been well known. Unlike many sick and injured in the Scriptures, rather than having friends who could help bring him to Jesus, Bartimaeus was actually told to be silent. Bartimaeus' fall from wealth would have been well known (and possibly even celebrated), showcasing the immense grace shown to him by Jesus in restoring his eyesight.

## Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 25 – Year B

This short account in Mark offers several powerful teachings as to the nature of faith, especially as it was understood in the 1st Century. Firstly, we can note the persistence of blind Bartimaeus who was determined to be healed by Jesus. Secondly, he addressed Jesus with the royal title “son of David” in loud cries, not discouraged into silence when the crowd pressured him to be quiet. To Bartimaeus Jesus was more than simply a teacher from Nazareth, He was the son of David.

While Jesus never directly referred to Himself with this title, preferring the term “the son of man”, many (including the Gospel writers) recognized Jesus’ relation to the prophecies regarding the throne of David. There was also a tradition in the late 2nd Temple period that suggested that Solomon, the son of David, had great powers of healing as well as dominion over demons. Like everyone in the land, the blind man had heard of the miracles that Jesus and His disciples had been doing. And so Bartimaeus directly asked Jesus for mercy.

The mercy, which is actually a request for healing, was not owed to the man in any way. He was simply crying out for a kindness and a show of grace he believed Jesus could provide. Jesus responded to the man’s persistence by asking, “What do you want me to do for you?” After giving the man his sight, Jesus stated, “Your faith has made you well.”

What did the man want? The mercy of receiving his eyesight. Bartimaeus called Jesus the “Son of David” and “Rabbi” but almost certainly did not yet see Jesus as the divine incarnation—Immanuel, God with us. He also did not repent. What kind of faith was this that made him well?

Faith isn’t simply a spiritual term, it has meaning beyond a belief in something very specific such as God or Jesus. Faith, particularly in the Hebraic understanding, was putting what you believed into practice.<sup>21</sup> And you were to practice this faith steadfastly and persistently. Bartimaeus believed that Jesus could heal. Even when he was told to be quiet he refused and continued to persistently pester Jesus until he would receive mercy. Of course, having received Jesus’ mercy, Bartimaeus did not stop his persistence. He had faith enough to also follow Jesus to Jerusalem for the festival—as God had commanded. This was the last miracle Jesus performed before His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

**Hebraic Perspective.** Faith in Hebrew is the word *emunah* אֱמוּנָה. Interestingly, the word faith is not found in the book of Genesis. The word first appears in the book of Exodus 17:12 during the

---

<sup>21</sup> See Hebraic Perspective

## Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 25 – Year B

battle of Amalek.<sup>22</sup> God had rescued Israel from Egypt and they were journeying towards Mount Sinai. But almost immediately, the Amalekites attacked Israel. Specifically they attacked those who were weary and faint—the weak and old who may have had trouble keeping up with the others. The Amalekites did not fear God.

Israel was a nation of slaves, shepherds and builders. They did not know how to fight and were probably terrified. But a simple battle plan was drawn up and Moses would stand on a hill, holding up his hands, while Joshua fought the Amalekites. The battle plan was reliant on an old man steadfastly holding up his hands with a staff in hand. That is faith.

But this faith wasn't only believing that God would be victorious, no, faith was Moses steadfastly holding up his hands—in its first appearance in the Bible, the word *emunah* was translated as steadfast as Aaron and Hur kept Moses' hands "faithing" until sunset.

Why "faithing"? *Emunah* is a gerund. In linguistics, a gerund is a non finite form of a verb—it describes a verb that you are doing. In English it is shown through the addition of '-ing' to a word. So the verb to walk becomes walking when you are putting it into practice. The verb to read becomes reading and faith becomes "faithing". Since faithing is, unfortunately, not a common word in English, a better translation of *Emunah* might be faithfully or, in Greek, faithfulness.<sup>23</sup> Being faithful implies action. Moses simply didn't believe that if he held his hands up it would mean victory for Israel, he actually had to hold them up.

Faith at the time of Jesus was more than simple belief. Faith is steadfast. It is persistence and determination not to give up but to endure. At Jericho, Bartimaeus believed Jesus could heal

---

<sup>22</sup> While words can often change, words that have a strong grounding in a particular piece of literature often maintain, or even change to obtain, the specific meaning in that context. In many cases, when words appear in the Hebrew Scriptures for the first time, the location and context forever gives that word a nuance and meaning that the word will always carry forward. Both Biblical faith and love should be viewed in this light.

<sup>23</sup> Many orthodox Christians have a problem when the Bible clearly says that God is faithing, they may say, "God cannot have faith because He knows all things". But faith has little to do with knowledge (nor of hope, in the wishy-washy sense of the word) in the Hebrew Bible—faith gives proof to those witnessing it. In Hebrews 11, faith isn't the thing hoped for or the thing unseen, faith is the proof—existence or support—of things hoped for or unseen.

In each of the cases spoken of in Hebrews 11, people acted—they did not stand and hope for something and, in the end, there was proof that God is and that He commends those who by righteousness are faithful. And what of the first example given in Hebrews 11:3? "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible." We do not hope to see the universe, we see the universe by faith—because it is there. The word of God created it. Surely, the things we can be most assured about concerning things we hope for are the things that God has already been faithful in.



## Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 25 – Year B

and he refused to be quieted by the crowd. He lived in a world of darkness and he had the earnest desire to see. The more they told Bartimaeus to shut up, the louder he became. Jesus could see his faith, or faithfulness, in action. He saw his steadfastness and persistence and commended him for it. Even as Jesus was being faithful in walking towards the cross, Jesus had mercy—bringing light to a dark world.

### ACNA Readings

**Isaiah 59:9-20.** People are quite capable of complaining, or even blaming others, for something we brought on ourselves. God gave us His ethics and morality to live by. Israel heard the voice of God, as have the nations since, and yet they did not live by God's ethics and morality—they did not do justice or righteousness. Instead, “the way of peace they did not know, and there is no justice in their paths”<sup>24</sup>

There is a natural result of not living by the ethics and morality of God.<sup>25</sup> Isaiah told Israel that they would seek light but find only darkness. They would hope for justice and salvation but would not find it—for there was no one living in obedience to God. They denied God and turned their back from following God. Having given themselves over to darkness, darkness would envelop them—and it was of their own making.

“The LORD saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice.” But, as seen throughout the prophets, that didn't mean that God was done with Israel. Even if men don't obey God, He does not change His own nature. It is the Lord's character to bring light and to defeat darkness in all its forms. While Isaiah noted that no one came forward to intercede for the people, God Himself became the redeemer, enshrining Himself in metaphorical armour, similar to the armour of God seen in Ephesians.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> The prophets of God would likely be saying the same things to the world today. Our feet run to evil and are swift to shed innocent blood. And let us not forget how quickly some even in the church abandon the ethics and morality of God as, surely, God is a God of mercy. [The world's] mercy has replaced obedience. Except we are not merciful for we are not obedient.

<sup>25</sup> For anyone seeking the ethics and morality of their culture and their world, there will be no foundation. The ethics and morality of this world will constantly change as the world changes. If we are nothing more than animals, why would we not behave like animals? Today we might cooperate, assuming it is beneficial for me, but tomorrow it might be more beneficial to steal, to lie, to kill—what can a baby or an elderly woman do for me?

<sup>26</sup> In Ephesians, Paul urged us to put on the armour of God. We don't put on our own armour nor is it something that is exclusively individual. Isaiah made it clear that the armour is God's and He is the one who wears it. In Ephesians 6, we (Paul used the plural, “you all”) are strengthened by the strength of God's might before proceeding to put on the armour.

**Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People**  
Proper 25 – Year B

In context, putting on the armour of God isn't simply some mystical idea of truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the word of God along with prayer at all times. The armour of God is supposed to be the practical actions we take to intercede. Rather than suing people unjustly and without honesty, or spreading falsehoods in wickedness, we are to be truthful. Rather than having feet that run to evil and are swift to shed innocent blood, we should be quick to peace.

The good news from the prophet is that God will not leave his people to grope around in despair and darkness, even if that darkness is the result of poor choices and behaviour because we do not intercede. First, He will intercede to bring justice, righteousness, and salvation (although sometimes that will include His wrath). Second, God made a promise that a redeemer would come to Zion. God's light and salvation will overcome the darkness. And finally, God truly wanted someone to intercede. He was displeased when no one did! Which means that yes, He wants us to put on His armour and practically fear God by obeying His commandments—bringing justice, peace, and righteousness to the world.

**Psalm 13.** “How long, O Lord?” That is the question asked by David after he endured heartache, abandonment, fear, and faced many enemies. It will also be asked by the martyrs of God (Revelations 6:10). And yet Levitical priests, whose job was to stand at the Temple and sing praises, would also ask this question (Psalm 89:46). Whether it's because we are waiting for just judgment to come upon those who prey on the righteous or because we are under God's judgment and longing for His mercy, it is probably a question we will all ask God at one time or another.

The Psalm gives no context regarding its history and we cannot know why David wrote these words, asking “how long” four times. Nonetheless, we can acutely understand that David felt like

---

Paul wasn't the only writer who read Isaiah and spoke of spiritual warfare, the Book of Wisdom 5:17-20 states, “The Lord will take his zeal as his whole armour and will arm all creation to repel his enemies; He will put on righteousness as a breastplate, and wear impartial justice as a helmet; He will take holiness as an invincible shield and sharpen stern wrath for a sword”. Once again, what is used is the armour of God—He is the one who put on the breastplate, helmet, shield, and sword. However, God also armed His creation. We should never forget that we aren't putting on our own armour, we are putting on God's armour in order that we can withstand the schemes of the devil.

## Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 25 – Year B

the LORD had abandoned him.<sup>27</sup> The feeling that we have been neglected by God is probably a feeling we have all felt. But it is important to know the difference between our feelings and reality.<sup>28</sup> David, even as he asked the question, had the faith and trust in God to know that God gave salvation.

He asked that God would “light up my eyes” or, as David wrote in Psalm 31:16, “Make Your face shine on Your servant; save me in Your steadfast love!” This is an excellent prayer for us when we are going through dark times, and we feel that God is not answering our prayers or has turned his face from us. We can ask for the Lord to bring His light and salvation into our situation.

Light is often paired with salvation in the Hebrew Scriptures. Ever since the fall, the light of God has been chasing away the darkness and bringing his salvation with him. David ends the psalm in a state of confidence, with his feelings of neglect softening in the light of God. The darkness has passed, and in the last verses we find David declaring his trust in the unfailing love of God and rejoicing again in his salvation. Lord, restore to us again the joy of our salvation.

**Hebrews 5:11-6:12.** Hebrews can be a very difficult book for many of us to understand. The author continuously quoted a single sentence (or even half a sentence) assuming that the listeners would understand the context and why that verse was important to the argument the author was making. But Hebrews 5:11-6:3 states that the author was having trouble communicating all that they wanted to for those listening were “dull of hearing” and immature. Being dull in hearing is not a problem of the ears but a problem of the heart. The hearts of the listeners were slow to respond in learning and were, perhaps, simply uninterested in hearing about the things of God.

The addressees of Hebrews apparently had been followers of Messiah for some time. The author chastises them for their immaturity, saying that they should have been teaching others by

---

<sup>27</sup> God is supposed to know everything, and yet the Bible occasionally states that “God remembered” or, here, “Will you forget me forever?” Did God need to be reminded that Noah, the children of Israel, or David still lived? While we often think of remembrance as being intellectual, the Bible speaks of it as an active participation—God remembered or, in other words, God acted. But here, David was asking if God was ever going to act.

We too may often feel like God rarely acts in this world, let alone in our lives. But David also noted that God was merciful, provided salvation, and gave bountifully. After asking God if He is present in our lives, it would be good to remember all that He has done.

<sup>28</sup> Does God always act on behalf of people, “remembering” them? There are times that God stops acting on behalf of even His people. When David understood the iniquity that separated him from God, he asked that God would “cast me not away from your presence”. Thankfully, God almost always gives a way towards restoration and forgiveness.

## Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 25 – Year B

now and not still learning the basics. The basics are described as 'milk', and Hebrews 6 lays out some of the basics as elementary principles: repentance and faith, baptism and laying of hands, resurrection and judgment.<sup>29</sup> The writer of Hebrews wants his readers to go beyond the basics.

It is not that the basics are bad. In fact, they are very, very good. However, there is nothing to be gained by immaturity. Following Jesus is not a static concept but implies motion and movement. Following Jesus means learning and growing in the walk of faith in which we learn to become better disciples. Every day I should taste the goodness of the word of God and draw closer to God—go on to maturity.

The writer of Hebrews gives a warning to his dull of hearing and immature readers. The writer is speaking of people who have had amazing spiritual experiences including a sharing in the Holy Spirit, but who have fallen away, declaring the impossibility to be renewed again through repentance. Falling away is different from falling into sin. It is an important warning that we should not brush aside.<sup>30</sup> We should also not become so entrenched in trying to figure out if we have personally fallen away beyond redemption, so as to be completely useless for service in the kingdom. The author of Hebrews encourages the believers to have “the full assurance of hope until the end”. The basics of the faith already give us the hope and light of the Good News. But continuing to serve the saints in work and love, continuing to learn the word of righteousness, while difficult at times, will give us even more hope and light of the Good News.

---

<sup>29</sup> It seems that these six principles were laid out in pairs, perhaps for ease of memory or the method by which they were taught in early catechesis. But it could also be following a pattern of Hebraic poetry, mentioning two things that say almost the same thing to emphasize a point.

<sup>30</sup> Hebrews 6:4-6 is one of those passages of Scripture in which it is almost impossible to make a comment without causing offense. It has been interpreted in several different ways. But regardless of the interpretation it is not a pleasant or simple statement.