

Central Lutheran Church

Narrative Lectionary Bible Study - Fall, 2020

November 18 Lesson

Welcome and Introduction

We continue with this weekly “water stop” in our shared covid-19 marathon. Thank you for joining this study, it is so good to be together for holy conversation and to “see” one another on Zoom. A few quick reminders:

1. The narrative lectionary was developed with the goal of hearing lessons that we do not often encounter in the common lectionary. This year we will “travel” through the history of God’s love for the world.
2. These Bible studies are more holy conversations. No previous knowledge is expected, in fact it helps to seek to enter the study as if for the first time. You are invited to attend the Zoom study each week, but the invitation is always open for when it works in your schedule.
3. Christ Care Prayers begin each lesson, it is a time when we pray for one another and the needs of the world. If you have a prayer concern that you do not want to share in front of the group, you can send a private chat to the pastor who is leading the study.
4. Yep, we may break out into conversation groups. Have no fear, one of the pastors will be in each of the groups to help facilitate the conversation.

Schedule

September 9 - Genesis 2: 4b-7, 15-17; 3:1-8 (Creation and “fall”)

September 16 - Genesis 15: 1-6 (God’s promise to Abraham/ Sarah)

September 23 - Genesis 37: 3-8, 17b-22, 26-34; 50:15-21 (Joseph’s dreams)

September 30 - Exodus 12:1-3; 13:1-8 (Passover)

October 7 - Exodus 32: 1-14 (Golden Calf)

October 14 - 1 Samuel 1: 9-11, 19-20; 2:1-10 (Hannah and Samuel)

October 21 - 2 Samuel 7: 1-17 (David and Nathan)

October 28 - 1 Kings 17: 1-24 (Elijah and the widow)

November 4 - Jonah 1:1-17; 3: 1-10; 4:1-11 (Jonah)

November 11 - Isaiah 6: 1-8 (Holy, Holy, Holy)

November 18 - Jeremiah 36: 1-8, 21-23, 27-28; 31: 31-34 (New Covenant)

November 25 – NO Zoom Study, Thanksgiving Weekend

December 2 - Joel 2:12-13, 28-29 (Merciful God, promise of Spirit)

December 9 - Isaiah 61: 1-11 (Spirit of the Lord)

December 16 - Luke 1:26-45, 46-56 (Annunciation and Magnificat)

December 23 and 30 – NO Zoom Study, Christmas break

January 6 – Zoom Study Resumes

Narrative Study for Wednesday, November 18

Welcome and Christ Care Prayers

Prophets – A soul in pain

Last week we paused to consider our own touchstone moments. When have you experienced God? Where has God shown up for you in a way that inspired awe, wonder, or what Heschel calls “radical amazement.” A few of us had a chance to share some of our glimpses of the divine. We paused to listen to Isaiah’s call, the wonder of the temple filled with smoke with Seraphs in flight.

The gift of touchstone moments or places is that they stay with us. We can call them up, heart, mind and soul, in moments of deep need and in the midst of great joy and blessing.

Tonight, we turn to the prophet Jeremiah. His prophetic voice is different than Isaiah, or other prophets for that matter, even as he continued within the tradition as one called to “radical amazement.”

Abraham Heschel (yes, once again we turn to him) calls Jeremiah a “soul in pain.” It is because of Jeremiah’s distress that we can have a conversation about the complex and often uneasy topic of God’s wrath. Of all the prophets, Jeremiah most frequently expresses the word of God’s wrath. Some even call him the prophet of wrath, which is why he was a soul in pain.

Yet, Heschel provides a key nuance for our conversation as we begin. He writes, “however, it would be more significant to say that Jeremiah lived in an age of wrath. His contemporaries had no understanding of the portent of their times, of the way in which God was present at the time.” The Prophets, page 134

The nuanced conversation is grounded in these basic questions:

1. What does it mean to live with an entirely theo-centric world view? In other words, all good or all bad comes from God. Do we live in that world view, or one shaped by other insights and forces (some good and some bad)?
2. In the writing of scripture, how does this theo-centric world view shape both the understanding of blessing and of wrath? In other words, how do we ponder God’s presence in daily human life? Why do we look to God when it is good and wonder where is God or why is God’s wrath present when it may be our own stuff and not God?

One example might be today's issue of radical climate change. In a hundred years when the story of climate change is written, will our culture name it as the wrath of God because of our failure to tend to what people of faith, faithful scientists and others point to now as a critical prophet moment? Or will we write the story of our arrogance, naming God's call and presence that tried to call us away from the behavior that led to the crisis?

It is within this basic nuance that we can approach Jeremiah. We can also name that Jeremiah is a unique personality, who certainly embodied Heshel's other image that prophets are in "fellowship with the feelings of God, a sympathy with the divine pathos, a communion with the divine consciousness which comes about through the prophet's reflection of, or participation in the divine pathos... Sympathy is the prophet's answer to inspiration, the correlative to revelation."

As we turn to Jeremiah tonight, we pause for two passages that the narrative lectionary reads out of order. A unique way to engage in what Jeremiah experiences, and then how Jeremiah names the experience of God's pathos, God's yearning for relationship. A relationship that is always complicated by our ego, a relationship that is more like parent and child.

Tonight's Lesson: Jeremiah 36: 1-8, 21-23, 27-28; 31: 31-34

Missing verses? It is not uncommon to skip over verses that are not central to the main theme or plot of the reading. You can read the missing verses on your own, but it is helpful to note that verses 9-20 is a re-reading of the scroll by Baruch, Jeremiah's recorder. It is also when Jeremiah and Baruch are told to go and hide because of the issue with the king. Verses 24-26 is more drama with the king and the Lord hiding them. Jeremiah then has the scroll re-written. What follows after chapter 36 is the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC at the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The story is that Jeremiah is then taken to Egypt (Jeremiah 43: 6-7). Prophecy follows, and Jeremiah's book ends with a historical appendix in chapter 52.

Lectio Divina

One of the oldest ways to enter the holy conversation at a Bible study is to spend time reading the lesson slowly, and at least three times. This way is called "lectio divina," or divine reading. You can read the lesson silently, or even out loud if you are in a quiet place. There are many ways to engage in *lectio divina*, here is one way to consider:

1. The first time we read the lesson for the information, the story that is being shared. Here we read with our head, asking what we first noticed?
2. The second time, we slow down and read with our heart. What emotions do you notice as you read and respond or react to in the lesson?
3. The third and final time, really slow down. Perhaps you pause or stop at a verse, linger there. Here you begin to read with your soul. What is God saying in, with and under this story? What is God not saying, in other words, is God speaking or does it seem more like human interpretation at this point. What is liberating or what is troubling?

Jeremiah 36: 1-8, 21-23, 27-28; 31: 31-34

Jeremiah 36: 1-8 - In the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today. ³It may be that when the house of Judah hears of all the disasters that I intend to do to them, all of them may turn from their evil ways, so that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin. ⁴Then Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote on a scroll at Jeremiah's dictation all the words of the LORD that he had spoken to him. ⁵And Jeremiah ordered Baruch, saying, "I am prevented from entering the house of the LORD; ⁶so you go yourself, and on a fast day in the hearing of the people in the LORD's house you shall read the words of the LORD from the scroll that you have written at my dictation. You shall read them also in the hearing of all the people of Judah who come up from their towns. ⁷It may be that their plea will come before the LORD, and that all of them will turn from their evil ways, for great is the anger and wrath that the LORD has pronounced against this people." ⁸And Baruch son of Neriah did all that the prophet Jeremiah ordered him about reading from the scroll the words of the LORD in the LORD's house.

21-23 - Then the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and he took it from the chamber of Elishama the secretary; and Jehudi read it to the king and all the officials who stood beside the king. ²²Now the king was sitting in his winter apartment (it was the ninth month), and there was a fire burning in the brazier before him. ²³As Jehudi read three or four columns, the king would cut them off with a penknife and throw them into the fire in the brazier, until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the brazier.

27-28 - Now, after the king had burned the scroll with the words that Baruch wrote at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ²⁸Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which King Jehoiakim of Judah has burned.

Jeremiah 31: 31-34 - 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. ³²It 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. ³³But 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. ³⁴No 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.

Conversation and Questions from the Divine Reading

1. What did you notice? What was interesting, or confusing? What was familiar or unfamiliar?
2. What emotions did you notice as you read? How did you respond or react to the lesson?
3. What is God saying in, with and under this story? What is God not saying, in other words, is God speaking or does it seem more like human interpretation at this point. What is liberating or what is troubling? How are you open to God as you pause for this third reading?
4. What questions do you bring tonight for us to discuss?

Further questions for conversation, time permitting

1. We witness the move from oral to written culture in this lesson on Jeremiah's scroll. We also witness "book burning." Why have despots burned books in history? What is it about the recorded story that lives on in print beyond the life of the author and why is this important?
2. Jeremiah 29 is a passage that is often quoted to help balance the raging prophet. How is this passage a hopeful and grounding word in the midst of Jeremiah: "For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ¹¹For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. ¹²Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. ¹³When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, ¹⁴I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile."