

GET INTO SCRIPTURE - AN ANCIENT FORM OF TEXT MESSAGING

THE MBPC TEXTER

MOUNTAIN BROOK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH/ BIRMINGHAM AL



Sunday, October 13th
28th Sunday in Ordinary Times

Reading 1

JEREMIAH 29:1, 4-7

This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

4 This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. 7 Also, seek the peace

and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

ABOUT THE TEXT:

The policy of accommodation, cooperative political activities and praying to God for the well-being of a foreign city as suggested by Jeremiah was both innovative and a great challenge to the exilic community. It also has lessons for us as we seek a public, politically and socially relevant theology. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. The policy of accommodation, cooperative political activities, and praying to God for the well-being of a foreign city as

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suggested by Jeremiah was both innovative and a great challenge to the exilic community. The letter contradicts other prophets, who supported patriotic actions and an anti-Babylonian policy, prophets who relied on the faith traditions of Israel and championed a short stay in Babylon and a speedy return to Jerusalem. They drew on the compassion and the promise of God to the house of David, and the temple of Jerusalem, and believed very much in the inviolability of both the Davidic dynasty and Zion. As the prophet of critique and hope, Jeremiah rejects their optimism, and was certain that a return to the past is no longer possible. He suggests strategies to survive the suffering and devastation of war and a shattered world, albeit without the old support systems, namely monarchy, temple and land. Jeremiah envisioned a beginning to the healing needed, both communal and individual, in the openness and the courage to give up unrealizable hopes and other harmful practices that seemed to offer a false sense of security.

Jeremiah was in a position to send this letter because he was left behind in the deportations; the Babylonians did not think he was worth the effort of deporting. When Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, he razed and looted the Temple, took the chief priest hostage and exiled (or killed) everyone else. Verse 1 of our reading says that the surviving elders, priests, and prophets were all in Babylon. The religious establishment was disbanded, traumatized, and in need of a prophetic word themselves. Jeremiah was never a formal part of

that establishment. He was an outsider prophet. And now he was in a position to serve God by serving the people who beat, imprisoned, and rejected him.

Jeremiah was not called to serve in the splendor of the temple supported by the coffers of the monarchy although that might have been his preference. (In 5:4-5, Jeremiah dismisses the poor and asks to be sent to the rich!) Jeremiah was called to serve amid the devastation and destruction of everything he knew. And in his moment in the spotlight, when he could have spoken as the second coming of Moses, proclaiming liberation from Babylon and a second Exodus to the Promised Land, Jeremiah had some bad news. The people were not going anywhere. God's word to the exiles was to seek the welfare of their conquerors; to pray for them for their fates are inextricably bound up together.

Jeremiah's letter offers a formula for transformation. Hope replaces despair as immigrants can get better jobs and put down roots where they live rather than living in constant fear of deportation. Congregations may need to be reminded that v. 7 only makes sense if immigrants find a welcome in our society. People have emigrated since biblical times, and the Bible calls us to compassion and love in response to immigration.

A Wisdom of Mr Rogers

“You know, I think everybody longs to be loved, and longs to know that he or she is lovable. And, consequently, the greatest thing that we can do is to help somebody know that they're loved and capable of loving.”

READING 2

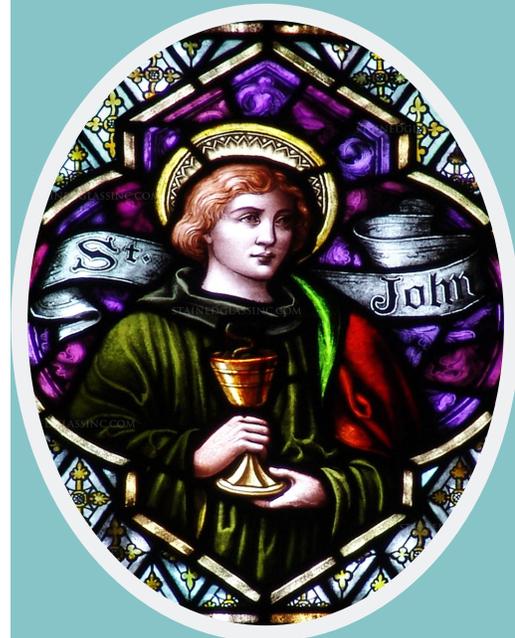
JOHN 2:1-11

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, 2 and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." 4 "Woman,[a] why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. [b]7 Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. 8 Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, 9 and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside 10 and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." 11 What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

:ABOUT THE TEXT:

It is rather significant that John mentions the "third day." He is referring, of course, to the third day after Jesus had left Judea. (It was a two-day walk to Galilee, and they would have arrived on the morning of the third day.) John has particularly noted this because the third day has a symbolic meaning. Remember that John the Apostle wrote his gospel much later than the other gospels were written -- some thirty or forty years after these events took place, in fact. By then he had opportunity to review carefully the events that he had been teaching and preaching about for all that time, and to select from that running memory the important things he wanted to stress. Thus everything in the Gospel of John is particularly put there for a reason.

This mention of the third day is a reference to what is clearly evident elsewhere in the Scriptures: it is a reference to the fact of the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus had not yet taken place, of course, but even in the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament there is a reference to the third day as being the day in which Israel would be spiritually healed and returned to her Lord (Hosea 6:2). Here, then, is the first hint in this account of the significance of this miracle of changing water into wine: it was a miracle of transformation, of bringing life out of death. We are given here a hint of what this miracle symbolizes.



The wedding takes place after multiple days of celebration. The wine had most likely not been accounted for and Jesus came with additional men (his disciples) to the celebration. Mary seized the occasion to say, very significantly to Jesus, "They have no wine." She does not ask him to do anything about it; she merely tells him, "They have no wine." Some of the commentators suggest that what she meant is that Jesus and his disciples ought to leave; that this was a gentle hint to them that they were unwanted additions to the marriage feast; that they had strained the hospitality of their hosts and they ought to leave. Others say that Mary did not expect any miracle because Jesus had done no miracle up to this point. That, of course, is true. There are apocryphal gospels that speak of Jesus doing miracles as a boy; of his making clay pigeons and then waving his hands and they fly off, leaving his playmates' pigeons lying in the dust, etc. But those are purely imaginative accounts. John clearly says that this is the first miracle that our Lord did. We must understand that at this time Mary's expectations had been greatly awakened. Undoubtedly she had been told the accounts of what happened in Judea; how Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, how the heavens opened and a dove lighted on Jesus' head, and a voice uttered those remarkable words, "This is my beloved Son," (Matthew 3:17). She remembered the promises when he was born that he would be the Messiah. Undoubtedly she expected him to act.

Faith is the purpose of the miracle, as it is in all the miracles in John's Gospel. Good works are by-products of faith. Faith is not a matter of coercion but of wonder at the miracle of Christ. It is an overwhelming gift in which the Giver Himself resides.

Without that power, without the Giver in the gift, all attempts at recycling and good works would be for nothing for they would be based upon the wrong premise of utilitarianism, self-preservation, or the like. But with faith in Christ as the source and meaning of all good things, whatever we do will be done for the proper reason: out of thanks to Christ for filling our lives.

This quiet miracle is the manifestation of Christ's glory. But no one actually saw it. Nor was there a thunder clap to herald the event. God's glory is not what humans expect it to be. His glory is not for mere display, but has the purpose to fulfill his service to his creation. He buries Himself in a quiet tomb to do his work on Easter where no one can see or hear. As Martin Luther said, "God hides his pearls in a pile of dung so the devil can't find them."

In Christ, the very nature of glory is being redefined. It is glory with a silent purpose and aim, to create and maintain faith in Christ Jesus who responds to human need in ways that seem hidden and mysterious, but whose deeds are open to the eyes of faith.



Reading 1

JEREMIAH 29:1, 4-7

Commentary, Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7, Garrett Galvin, Preaching This Week, WorkingPreacher.org, 2013.

"Pray for the Shalom of the City," John C. Holbert, Opening the Old Testament, 2013.

"Wisdom for a Church in Exile," Steve Godfrey, Church in the World, 2013.

"Seeking the Peace and Prosperity of the City," The Politics of Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7, Political Theology Today, 2013.

"Facing the Wilderness," Naomi Annandale, Upper Room Books, 2013.

"Count on It," Alan Brehm, The Waking Dreamer, 2013.

Commentary, Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7, Wil Gafney, Preaching This Week, WorkingPreacher.org, 2010.

READING 2

JOHN 2:1-11

Commentary, John 2:1-11, Karoline Lewis, Preaching This Week, WorkingPreacher.org, 2013.

"The Wedding at Cana," "Marriage," Frederick Buechner, Buechner Blog.

"The Sign of the Hour," D Mark Davis, raw translation and exegesis/questions, Left Behind and Loving It, 2013.

"Learnng to Tell Time," David Lose, Dear Working Preacher, 2013.

"Wedding Mishaps and the Cross," Alyce M. McKenzie, Edgy Exegesis, 2013.

"Cana - An Unexpected Time," Nancy Rockwell, Bite in the Apple, 2013.

