

## Sunday on 2 - 8 October (Proper 22)

### **Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 2: 18-25**

God has just finished the **entire** creation, including Adam. But as we begin today's lesson, we see that God observes that Adam should not be **alone**; he should have a **helper**. But he wants Adam to appreciate that fact. So he has every living, moving creature on the earth pass in front of Adam, who is given the responsibility of **naming** each creature. In the process, Adam realizes that the livestock, the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field all come in **pairs**, but he didn't have someone to pair with. So to accommodate Adam, God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep (*i.e.*, administered **anesthesia**), removed a rib from Adam (*i.e.*, did **surgery**), and formed the rib into a woman (*i.e.*, performed **plastic surgery**). And so God presents a **helper to Adam**, whom Adam named "**Woman**." And with that God establishes the institution of **marriage, one man and one woman**, who become one.

Note that, at this time, sin has **not yet** entered the picture. So both Adam and Eve (the "Woman"), are naked, but there is no **shame** in being so.

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### **Epistle Lesson: Hebrews 2: 1-13 (14-18)**

The author of Hebrews admonishes his readers and hearers to pay much **closer** attention to what God's word says, because its message has been proven to be **totally reliable**, and we can easily observe that sin **does** receive a **just retribution**. In such a case, it is important **not** to neglect the **free salvation** that God offers to us through the suffering and death of Jesus. In fact, Jesus' ministry testified to that in **both** word and deed, as did the words and deeds of the early church. In addition, God the **Father** bears witness to that salvation through **signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit**. Furthermore, God the Father says of Jesus that he was made a little lower than the **angels** (*i.e.*, became a **human being**) for a time in order to **suffer death for all mankind**.

But now the Father has **crowned** him with glory and honor, placing **all creation** under his rule. Again, obviously, not **all** of creation has yet acknowledged Christ's rule in their lives. Nevertheless, Jesus by his **perfect obedience** to God the Father, even in his suffering and **death**, was able to earn salvation for **anyone who believes** in his redeeming work. And **everyone** who so believes **immediately** becomes a brother to Jesus (*i.e.*, **a child of God the Father**).

Then we are reminded that earth is not our **permanent** home; we are to ensure that we get to our **eternal** home in heaven. Our mind should then be on **heavenly** things, for which we should offer **praise** to God. Notice that this is described as a **sacrifice**, perhaps suggesting that we may not **feel** like praising God at certain times, but we still **need** to because God has **guaranteed** for us eternity with him. Can you think of someone in the Bible who offered a sacrifice of praise to God? Check out **Jonah 2:9!** Where **was** he when he stated these words?

Next the author of Hebrews suggests **deeds** on our part that would **demonstrate** that we are **grateful** to God:

- Do those things that are pleasing to God,
- Share what you have, even if it means sacrificially (see **Philippians 4:14-29**),
- Obey your leaders, submitting to them, and
- Pray for the brothers and sisters in the faith.

Perhaps we could practice showing meaningful **gratitude**, certainly in **words** but especially in our **behavior and actions**, starting with those in our **family!**

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**Gospel Lesson: Mark 10: 2-16**

After the episode in last Sunday's reading, where Jesus **admonishes** his disciples to make sure that they **remain** the **salt of the earth**, Jesus and his disciples leave Galilee and head **south** to Judah, but stay on the **east** side of the Jordan River. There crowds gather around him to hear his **teachings**. But also in the crowd are the **Pharisees**, always trying to figure out some way to **trick** him into saying the wrong thing. This time they ask whether it is OK for a husband to **divorce** his wife. Jesus responds with a question: what does **Moses' Law** teach? The Pharisees answer with a quote from **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**, that all he has to do is write out a **certificate of divorce** if he is **not** pleased with his wife. But then Jesus points out to them that this was merely a **concession** to the Children of Israel at **that** time because of the **hardness of their hearts**, and he reminds them of what Moses wrote earlier, in **Genesis 2**, which was our Old Testament Lesson for today, that God never **intended** for there to be divorce, the breaking up of a marriage. Rather, when **God** joined together a man and a woman in marriage, there was **no** provision for **a human** to separate them by a divorce. In fact, divorcing and remarrying is considered **adultery** (except for the circumstance mentioned by Jesus elsewhere of **unfaithfulness**—see **Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9**).

While this is going on, some of the crowd were bringing their **children** to Jesus so that he might touch them. The **disciples**, however, thought that this was an **intrusion** on Jesus' **true** ministry. But Jesus sets them **straight** by pointing out that the Kingdom of God is made up of **God's children**, and especially important to God are **children** who accept **on faith** anything that their parents tell them. When we accept what God tells **us** with that **same** kind of faith, **that** is the faith that allows one to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

## Sunday on 9 - 15 October (Proper 23)

### *Old Testament Lesson: Amos 5: 6-7 and 10-15*

**Amos** was one of God's prophets, although his ministry lasted only a few years, during the reign of **King Jeroboam II** of **Israel** of the **Northern** Kingdom. Although King Jeroboam II's reign lasted for 41 years, he nevertheless was regarded by God as an **evil** king, continuing the worship of his namesake, King Jeroboam I, who installed **two golden calves**, one in **Bethel** and one in Dan, for the people of Israel to worship, which they did **continually**. But because God had **compassion** on the people of Israel because of their **suffering** at the hands of the Syrians, the Moabites, and the Ammonites, God used King Jeroboam II to defeat their **enemies**.

In the first part of the book of Amos, God responds to the **cries** of the people of Israel for deliverance from their enemies by promising that he **will** punish the nations of **Syria, Gaza, Tyre, Ammon, and Moab**. But then God turns his attention to Israel itself. He promises judgment for **Bethel**, and castigates the leaders of Israel for the following **sins**:

- **perversion** of **justice** and **righteousness**,
- **hatred** of those who reprove their sins,
- **taking advantage** of and **taxing** the poor,
- building mansions for **themselves**,
- **harassing** the righteous,
- taking **bribes**, and
- ignoring the **needy**.

God advises the **righteous** to keep **silent** during such times because of the **evilness** of the people. But God also addresses the **rest** of Israel, admonishing them to

- **hate** evil,
- love **good**, and
- establish **justice** in the judicial system.

If **that** happens, God will **relent** of the planned **punishment** of Israel, and will be **gracious** to them instead. ( Is there a message here for **us**? Will history **repeat** itself? ) But we know how **that** went: 30 years later, the people of Israel **disappeared**, integrated into the kingdom of **Assyria** as **slaves**.

**Epistle Lesson: Hebrews 3: 12-19**

The author of Hebrews warns his readers/hearers **not** to **fall away** from the Living God by allowing their heart to be **hardened** by the pleasures and benefits of **sin**, thus **falling into unbelief** in the true God. He notes that only those who **remain** in faith **to the end** will enter **our** promised rest, **eternal life**. As an example, he cites the Children of Israel who were age 20 or older who **died** in the desert because of their **failure to believe** in God as well as their **rebellion** against God. They never entered **their promised rest**, living in the Promised Land **then** and eternal life **later**.

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**Gospel Lesson: Mark 10: 17-22**

Continuing our story from last Sunday, where we heard about God's perspective on divorce and on the **respect** that Children of God deserve, we now find Jesus and his disciples heading out to their **next** stop. But just then a man walks up to Jesus and asks him what he must **do** to inherit eternal life. [That was obviously a misunderstanding right there, because we all know that eternal life is a **gift of God** that was earned by Jesus' death on our behalf.] Nevertheless, Jesus responds by referring the man to the Ten Commandments, or the **Law**. The man replies that he has **kept** all of the commandments from his **youth**, apparently thinking that **human** righteousness is the equivalent of **God's** required righteousness.

[Again, we know that **this** is an impossibility, since the summary of the Law is to **love the Lord your God** with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind; and **love your neighbor** as yourself. And we remember, as this man **should** have, that all of **our** righteousness is as filthy rags (**Isaiah 64:6**).]

Nevertheless, Jesus cannot help but **love** the man, if anything for his **effort**, and gently suggests that if this is the case, then he will have no problem in **giving away everything** that he has to the poor so that he can have that desired treasure in **heaven**. But now the **deceitfulness of sin** reveals itself. The man has **many possessions**, and his heart is affixed to **them** rather than to being a servant of **God**.

## Sunday on 16 - 22 October (Proper 24)

### ***Old Testament Lesson: Ecclesiastes 5: 10-20***

The author of **Ecclesiastes**, King Solomon, is using this medium to pass on some of his **observations** of and **wisdom** about life. In today's reading, he notes the following truisms:

- No matter how **much** money you have, you will **never** have enough.
- The laborer sleeps **well** whether he has eaten a little or a lot, but the rich **cannot** sleep because their stomach is **too** full.
- The **rich** fritter their riches away with **bad** investments instead of giving their money more productively to the **needy**.
- People enter this world at birth with **no** money in their hand, and they leave this world at death with **no** money in their hand, so it would seem that there is no **gain** in toiling.
- Enjoyment in life comes with contentment with **whatever** God has or has **not** given you, because the **gift of God** is enjoying the work that **God** has given someone to do.

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### ***Epistle Lesson: Hebrews 4: 1-13 (14-16)***

The author of Hebrews continues his discussion of the observations that we began reading last Sunday. Here also he **warns** his readers/hearers not to be **disobedient** to the commands of the Lord, as did the Children of Israel in the desert, for they entered neither the **rest of the Promised Land** nor the **rest with God** as God observes **His** Sabbath. They lacked the **trust** in God, or the **believing** in God that constitutes **faith**, even though they were **given** the Promises of God. As he did in last Sunday's reading, the author of Hebrews warns against **hardening one's heart**, seeking the pleasures of this **world** by one's **own** manipulations rather than the pleasures with God in Heaven obtained by **faith in and obedience to** God.

So how **do** we find out what is **really** in our heart? By diligently **reading** and **meditating** on the Word of God, which is sharp enough to dissect out the

**thoughts and intentions** that we have hidden in our hearts. In fact, even though we may **fool** a lot of people about who we **really** are like, it would be pure **foolishness** on **our** part to think that we can fool **God** with our **lying and deceitful nature**. We are **totally** exposed in the sight of our ultimate Judge.

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**Gospel Lesson: Mark 10: 23-31**

We will recall from last Sunday's reading the encounter of Jesus with a **wealthy** man who wanted to know what he needed to **do** in order to gain eternal life. With the departure of that man, Jesus now comments to his disciples that it is **exceedingly** difficult for the wealthy to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The disciples are amazed, because they had been led to believe, in their teachings of the religious leaders, that whoever **gave the most** to the Temple, or who **had** the most—indicating God's blessings, would be **entitled** to eternal life; theirs was a **works** righteousness. So Jesus sets them straight. But **now** the disciples are confused. Who then **can** be saved? Jesus makes it very plain: it does not depend on **man**, but on **God**. It is **God** who must save us. We **cannot** do it ourselves.

Peter then seems to suggest that by giving up what they **do have** will earn them eternal life. Jesus again clarifies what is important: To do whatever **God requires** for Jesus' sake and for the sake of the **gospel**. But then he indicates that whatever we **give up** under such circumstances we will in some way **gain back**, and more, in this life **and** in the life to come, although it will be accompanied by **persecutions**. Then Jesus issues what could be considered a **warning**: those who are the **first** (*i.e.*, the rich, the stars, the movers of this age) will **not** make it to the Kingdom of God, but those who are **last** (*i.e.*, **believers used and abused** by the people of this world because they **serve God humbly and obediently**) will be the ones who enter the Kingdom of God.

## Reformation Day

(31 October)

### *First Lesson: Revelation 14: 6-7*

St. John is on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, southwest of Ephesus, **exiled** there for his **witnessing** to the truth of Jesus the Christ. One Sunday morning, Jesus appears to him in all his **glory**, with the instruction to write down **letters** to the seven churches in Asia Minor that Jesus is now going to dictate. As we all appreciate today, one or more of those seven letters could very well have been addressed to **any** one of the Christian churches in existence today.

But the dictation is followed by a **vision** of the **end times**, which in reality is the New Testament period. But today's reading focuses on what will be happening in the **very last days**. St. John sees and hears **an angel** flying over him, proclaiming to every people on earth that they should **fear God** and give him **glory**, because the creator of heaven and earth is now coming **to judge** the people.

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**Epistle Lesson: Romans 3: 19-28**

St. Paul is in the process of completing his **third** missionary journey and is now contemplating his next journey to Rome and then to Spain. Perhaps by way of introduction, he prepares this letter to the Christians in Rome, this letter being actually a brief **treatise** on the **Christian faith**. In today's reading, St. Paul is explaining the difference between law and gospel, noting that the **purpose of the law** is to make us **aware** of our sin. He states emphatically that in **no way** can **obedience** to the law save us, because **none** of us is without sin.

But then St. Paul explains the purpose of the **gospel**. It is to show us that by having **faith, or believing**, in the work of Jesus Christ, we will be **declared** righteous in God's eyes. That is to say, God declares in a **judicial** decision that we are righteous as a **gift**, made possible by the **substitutionary death of Christ** for the death that **we** deserved because of **our** sins. This thus demonstrates both God's **grace (undeserved favor)** to us as well as the correct **judgment** that he rendered. That is to say, by accepting Jesus' death in our place for our sins, God's righteous judgment of **punishment for sins** is satisfied.

Because **God did everything** needed for us to have eternal life, there is **no** provision for **good works** to assist in that process. What we consider to be **good** works is viewed as **filthy rags** by God (**Isaiah 64:6**). Therefore **no one** can be declared righteous by God through good works, but only by **faith** in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

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***Gospel Lesson: John 8: 31-36***

Today's reading finds Jesus in Jerusalem for the Festival of **Booths**, which celebrates the **fall** harvest. This was one of the festivals required by God which all Jewish men **had** to attend every year (**Deuteronomy 16:16-17**), because it was a means by which every **family** could express their thankfulness to God by sharing their bounty in a week-long celebration. But this also allowed people to get to know each **other** better. And wouldn't you know that this also allowed the **Pharisees and Jesus** to get to know each other better. Today's reading is one of many exchanges between the Pharisees and Jesus. The **sad** part about this discussion was that the Pharisees **refused** to listen to what Jesus was saying when he said that **they** needed to **believe in him** in order to be set **free** (from their sins). The Pharisees retort that, since **they** are descendants of Abraham, they have never been **enslaved to anyone**, obviously **conveniently** overlooking the **truth** that they not only were slaves in Egypt, but were slaves to many other nations, including Babylon.

But Jesus helps them to focus on the **spiritual** nature of what he is talking about by noting that **anyone who commits a sin is automatically a slave to sin**. And there is no provision for the slave to bail himself out of slavery. In a household, only the **descendant of the master**, or the **son**, is part of the household. A slave **never** becomes a part of the household, or an heir, **unless** the son sets that slave free, referring to the fact that only **Jesus' substitutionary death** would enable a person to become **spiritually free**.

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## Reformation Day

### ***Alternate Gospel Lesson: Matthew 11: 12-19***

Recall that Herod the Tetrarch has ***imprisoned*** John the Baptist, apparently at the insistence of his wife Herodias. The **Reason**: Herod had divorced his wife to marry Herodias, who ***had*** been Herod's brother Philip's wife; while Herodias had divorced her husband to marry Herod, which was an ***adulterous*** relationship. John the Baptist had brought this adulterous relationship to the ***attention*** of Herod and Herodias on ***multiple*** occasions, to the gross irritation of Herodias, so she wanted the messenger of God ***silenced***. John, probably aware that his death was imminent, sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ascertain whether Jesus really ***was*** the Messiah. There may have been two reasons for this: (1) John may have wondered whether ***he*** had made a ***mistake*** in identifying Jesus as the Messiah, because he now felt ***abandoned*** by God. (2) John may still have been ***positive*** about Jesus being the Messiah, but he needed to direct his ***disciples*** to Jesus.

As John's two disciples leave to carry Jesus' ***reassurance*** to John, Jesus addresses the crowd around him ***about*** John, stating that John is ***more*** than just a prophet. He is the prophet identified by Malachi (***Malachi 4: 5***) as the ***forerunner*** of the Messiah, the "***Elijah***" who is to come. And John is now suffering the ***violence*** that marks the present period of time. Jesus then compares that ***present*** generation to ***children*** who always are finding ***something*** to criticize: In this case, John arrived neither eating rich foods or drinking excessively, and was accused of having a ***demon***; but when Jesus arrived, sharing meals with tax collectors and sinners, he is accused of being a ***glutton*** and a ***drunkard***. There just is no pleasing ***some*** people.

But Jesus' **bottom line**: the ***wisdom*** of what people ***do*** will be justified by the ***kind*** of deeds they perform.