

## Sunday on 3 - 9 July (Proper 9)

### **Old Testament Lesson: Ezekiel 2: 1-5**

As we know, Ezekiel was God's prophet to the people of **Judah**, the **Southern** Kingdom, as they languished in Babylonian **captivity**. The reason they are in captivity is because they had **rejected God**. In today's reading, we find God calling Ezekiel to the ministry of **prophet** to the people in captivity, the people who God calls **rebellious, impudent, and stubborn**. In contrast, Ezekiel is called the "**son of man**," or more accurately, the "**son of Adam**," perhaps reflecting the closeness that God felt for Ezekiel while at the same time indicating that Ezekiel was God's humble **servant** to His Creator. And what is Ezekiel's **commission**? To call this rebellious crowd of captives to **repentance**.

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### **Epistle Lesson: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10**

Since our reading of last Sunday, St. Paul has provided **more** arguments to the Christians in Corinth that they should **share** their plenty with those of their **brethren** who are in poverty. Then he launches into a discussion of why he is **qualified** to admonish them in this way, indicating that **he too** is an apostle. But in today's reading, he presents a cogent **argument** for being one of God's **messengers** to the people of the world: he was given a vision of **heaven** which apparently he was **not** allowed to share. St. Paul admits that he would like to **boast** about this, but then notes that he has been given a "**thorn in the flesh**" by God to keep him humble, that despite this weakness, God would **still** keep him strong. And what are these weaknesses? St. Paul lists them: **insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities**. Through all of them, St. Paul remains **strong** because of God's **grace and power**.

Many people have speculated about what St. Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was, suggesting that it might have been poor eyesight (for example, see **Galatians 4:13-15**) or some other physical ailment. We might get some **insight** on this when we consider **other** passages of Scripture that **do** mention something equivalent to a thorn in the flesh, including **Numbers 33:55** and **Joshua 23:12-13**. In these latter two cases, a type of thorn in the flesh is specifically mentioned as being **hassled** by a group of people. Can **you** think of a group of people that continually hassled St. Paul throughout his ministry?

**Gospel Lesson: Mark 6: 1-13**

Recalling our reading from last Sunday, where Jesus had raised from the **dead** the daughter of Jairus, today's reading reveals Jesus leaving the city in which Jairus lived and returning to his **home** town. His disciples tagged along. As was His custom, Jesus went into the **synagogue** on the Sabbath to **teach**. But remember, Jesus is now in his **home** town, where he grew up. People knew him as the carpenter's son, Mary as his mother, and brothers James, Joses, Judas, and Simon, as well as sisters. So if Jesus grew up **among them**, how come He has such **wisdom**, and the **power** to do such miracles? In other words, why is **He** so special? **They** are certainly not going to be taught by this young **whipper-snapper!** So what do you do when you don't understand something, or don't **want** to understand something? You take **offense** at it. Prompting Jesus to note that a **prophet** is welcomed **everywhere** but in his hometown, among his relatives, and especially by his own **household**. As a consequence, only a **few** people had enough **faith** in Him to be healed of their illness, prompting Jesus to marvel at the extent of the **unbelief** present. (Remember last week's story?)

So Jesus went out to **other** villages, then sending the inner twelve disciples, two by two, ahead of Him to more villages to **prepare** them for His arrival. Note that He gives them **authority over demons**, resulting in their casting out demons but also **healing many diseases** as they preached the coming of the Kingdom of God, **calling people to repentance**. Note also that Jesus' instructions to His disciples included making their entire mission an **act of faith**—depending on **God** to provide through the generosity of **others** for their room and board.

## Sunday on 10 - 16 July (Proper 10)

### *Old Testament Lesson: Amos 7: 7-15*

Amos apparently was a **shepherd** who was selected by God to be His messenger to the **Northern** Kingdom, or **Israel**, for a short time during the reign of King **Jeroboam II**. King Jeroboam's reign lasted over 40 years, and it was through him that the Lord **restored** lands taken from Israel by Syria, Moab, and Ammon, among others. The Lord did this because He had **compassion** on the sufferings of His **people** at the hands of their enemies. Consequently, a certain element of **peace and prosperity** existed. However, **idolatry persisted** throughout the Northern Kingdom, particularly the idolatry introduced by King Jeroboam I, with the making of **two golden calves**, one of which was located in **Bethel**. Also remember that King Jeroboam I also established his **own** priesthood for the calves, which continued for the life of Israel. As God held the surrounding nations accountable for their brutality of **others**, so God held Israel accountable for **their** idolatry and the forsaking of their **covenant** with Him.

This latter is the picture presented to us in today's reading. God has given Amos a vision of a **plumb line** (apparently representing God's **covenant** with Israel) against a **wall** (representing the nation of Israel), which demonstrates that the wall is so far off from vertical, or **true**, that it cannot **help** but collapse. And God **confirms** this by saying that Israel will be **laid waste**. Of course, Amos had the responsibility of conveying this vision to Israel as a dire **warning of judgment** if **repentance** did not occur post haste. Instead, **Amaziah**, a member of the ersatz priesthood of the golden **calf** at Bethel, files a **complaint** against Amos to King Jeroboam, and also orders Amos to **flee** Israel and go to the **Southern** Kingdom, or **Judah**. But Amos responds that those are not **God's** orders.

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**Epistle Lesson: Ephesians 1: 3-14**

It was at the beginning of St. Paul's **third** missionary journey that he preached Christ to the people of **Ephesus**, a prominent seaport on the west coast of what is now Turkey. In fact, he eventually spent **three years** there, teaching them the **way of Christ**. But now St. Paul is **in prison** in Rome, and despite his imprisonment he still wants to write a **letter of encouragement** to the Ephesian Christians whom he loves dearly. St Paul begins a brief history of the world:

- God blessed us in Christ with **every** spiritual blessing;
- God chose us **before** He created the world as a people to be **holy** (*i.e.*, set apart) and **blameless** before Him;
- Because of God's love for us, he **adopted** us through the sacrifice of Jesus;
- In Christ, we have **redemption** through Christ's blood sacrifice, **forgiveness** of our sins, and the riches of **God's grace**;
- Through Christ, God revealed the **mystery** of His will, that He would unite in Christ **all** things in heaven and on earth;
- In Christ we have gained an **eternal inheritance**, which God planned for us from the very **beginning**;
- To those who have heard and **believed** the Gospel, God sealed with the Holy Spirit as a **guarantee** of our inheritance until we get to Heaven.

Wow! Talk about **love** and planning ahead. There is a reason that St. Paul cannot **help** but keep **praising** God for **all** that He has done for us.

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**Gospel Lesson: Mark 6: 14-29**

Recall from our reading of last Sunday that Jesus had now sent the twelve **ahead** of him to preach **repentance**, to heal the **sick**, and to cast out **demons**. Apparently the stories of what Jesus and his disciples are doing has gotten back to King Herod. This is **King Herod Antipas**, one of the sons of King Herod the Great (the baby killer). King Herod Antipas married his step-niece, **Herodias**, who had **previously** been married to his still living step-brother **Herod Philip**. It was **this** marriage that John the Baptist railed against, since it was a violation of the marriage laws of God given through Moses (**Lev. 18:16 and Lev. 20:21**).

In fact, **many** people were speculating about **who** Jesus might be. Some thought that he was **John the Baptist** raised from the dead, others that he was the promised **Elijah (Malachi 4:5)**, or possibly the promised prophet (**Deut. 18:15**). But King Herod, racked with **guilt** over his beheading of John the Baptist, is fearful that it **is** John the Baptist returning from the dead. The whole episode can be traced back to **vindictive** Herodias, who wanted to **kill** John the Baptist because of his condemnation of her marriage (if you love somebody and want to be happy, isn't it **OK** to marry him/her?). So **Herodias** first conned King Herod into imprisoning John the Baptist, which at least silenced his **voice**. But she was not satisfied. When her daughter Salome performed an extremely sensual **dance** for King Herod at one of his parties, and promised **Salome** up to half of his kingdom, Salome consulted her mother and ended up asking for the **head** of John the Baptist. So King Herod was faced with the choice of murdering John the Baptist or going **back** on his word. So he chose to save face by **beheading** John.

King Herod had been **warned** by God to **repent**. Instead, he killed the **messenger**. And isn't **that** the way the world goes **today**?

## Sunday on 17 - 23 July (Proper 11)

### **Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 23: 1-6**

Jeremiah was God's messenger to the **Southern** Kingdom, or **Judah**, during the forty-plus years **prior** to its being carried off into Babylonian Captivity. As a result, the messages are a mixture of **calls to repentance** for a nation sinking into **worldly** ways, warnings of **punishment** if repentance does not occur, and promises of **restoration** to a repentant people. Today's reading singles out **not** the people but the **religious leaders, or shepherds**, of the people. Why? Because instead of being concerned for the **spiritual** life of the people, they were concerned with **their own** earthly lives: they were in it for the **benefits**, e.g. places of honor at meals and meetings, keeping the money for the upkeep of the temple for themselves (see **2 Kings 12 and 22**), and for the **honors** they received in **public**. As a consequence, the spiritual growth of the people was at least **hindered** if not the people being driven **away** into idolatry.

God therefore states flatly that **He** will deal with these shepherds appropriately. And in addition, **He** will bring back to the fold sheep from **every** nation, and find shepherds who **will** take care of them. Finally, God states that He will raise up a **righteous** king and shepherd from the house of David, who will execute **justice** and **righteousness** in the land, and will **save** Israel (Israel here having a **double** meaning: to include the Children of Israel in the **Old** Testament days, and to include believers in Jesus the Christ in **New** Testament days—see **Romans 2:28-29; 3:28-30; 8:14-17; 9:29-33; and Galatians 3: 6-9, 13-14, and 28-29**). The name of this king and shepherd? **The Lord is our righteousness**, who could only be **Jesus**.

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### **Epistle Lesson: Ephesians 2: 11-22**

As St. Paul continues his letter of encouragement to the Christians in Ephesus, he basically **confirms** that what God said in our Old Testament Lesson has been **fulfilled**. **Gentiles**, who had been driven **away** from God by the Jews who practiced a religion of **exclusion** instead of **inclusion**, have now been brought to God by the blood **sacrifice** of that great **shepherd** of the sheep, **Jesus**. Furthermore, since Jesus died for the sins of the **whole** world, **Gentiles** who

believe in Jesus have the **exact same status** as Jews who believed in a coming Messiah in Old Testament days and now believe in **Jesus** in this New Testament period. So Jesus brought **peace with God** to the **Jews** (those who were “**near**”), and also to the **Gentiles** (those who are “**far off**”), making the two groups **fellow citizens** and **legitimate children** of the **same** household of God. In addition, with Jesus being the **cornerstone**, the Old Testament saints based on the foundation of the **prophets**, and the New Testament saints based on the foundation of the **apostles**, are being built into a **temple**, a dwelling place for **God** Himself.

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### Gospel Lesson: Mark 6: 30-44

As we continue from two weeks ago the story of Jesus’ ministry, which involved Jesus sending out the twelve ahead of Him to prepare villages for the **coming** of the Kingdom of God, we find in **today’s** reading the twelve **returning** to Jesus upon the **completion** of their mission. But even **then**, Jesus and His disciples are **constantly** surrounded by **crowds** needing His teaching and healing ministries, to the point where they no longer have time to **eat**. Jesus advises that they go to a desolate place to **recover** physically and mentally. But people **recognize** them in the boat that they are traveling in, surmise **where** they are going, and get there **ahead** of them, so that when Jesus and His disciples land on shore, there already is a great crowd **waiting** for them. Jesus’ **compassion** kicks in, and He starts to teach them, recognizing that **the crowd** was like **sheep without a shepherd**. The hours go by, and soon it is approaching dusk, so the disciples advise Jesus to send the crowd **away** so that they can find food in the surrounding villages. But when Jesus tells the disciples for **them** to give the crowd something to eat, they respond that **200 days of wages** would not be enough money to buy what was needed. Jesus still insists, telling them to see how much food is **available** there: just 5 hard rolls and two dried fish. So Jesus says, “Let’s go with these,” invites the crowd to sit down and instructs the disciples to **distribute** the rolls and fish after, of course, He has **blessed** it. And to the disciples’ astonishment, after all 5000 men (plus women and children) eat to their **full**, there are **still** 12 baskets-full of left-overs. So the **Great Shepherd** had provided for the crowd’s **spiritual and physical needs**.

## Sunday on 24 - 30 July (Proper 12)

### ***Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 9: 8-17***

The ***Great Flood*** has just ended, and Noah and his family, as well as all the ***creatures*** that they took with them, have ***exited*** the ark. The earth is now a ***new*** place, and so God sets Noah and his family down to explain the new ***rules***, among which is that, in addition to every ***green*** plant that God had given mankind for food previously, now every ***living/moving creature*** would be food for mankind as well. The only caveat when eating living things: they could not eat the ***blood***.

But then God makes the first ***covenant*** with the ***post-flood*** earth: God would place a ***rainbow*** in the sky whenever (rain) clouds are brought upon the earth, as a ***sign*** that God would ***never again*** destroy all living creatures by a flood.

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### ***Epistle Lesson: Ephesians 3: 14-21***

As St. Paul continues his letter to the Ephesian Christians, that we began reading two weeks ago, he takes a moment to acknowledge the ***enormity*** of the ***creation*** that God has achieved and ***each*** creation of which was named by God through Adam. He then turns to ***bless*** the Ephesians by asking God to strengthen his ***readers*** with that ***same*** power, so that Christ may be ***thoroughly*** entrenched in their ***hearts***, their faith ***sustained***, and their love ***enriched***. Why? So that they (and ***we as well!***) may be able to comprehend the ***enormity of the love*** that God showered on them ***through*** Jesus Christ, recognizing that God is able to do ***far*** more than what we can either ***ask or imagine***. Certainly to such a God as ours be ***glory*** in the present church and in eternity with Christ Jesus!

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**Gospel Lesson: Mark 6: 45-56**

Recall from last Sunday's reading that, after Jesus had taught the crowds in a desolate place, he fed the 5000 men (plus women and children) with 5 hard rolls and two dried fish. Having been fed, the crowd is now **dismissed**, and Jesus instructs his disciples to get into their boat and head back (**west**) to the other side of the Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida. In the meantime, Jesus went to the **top** of the mountain in order to spend some serious time with His **Father** in **prayer**. As you may recall from our previous description of the nature of the Sea of Galilee five weeks ago, storms can pop up **suddenly** and be **severe**. And sure enough, the disciples are caught in the **thick** of it. With the wind blowing against them, they are essentially at a **standstill**, if not worse. Jesus, seeing this from his vantage point, walks on the Sea toward them and then starts to **pass them by** when the disciples see him and cry out in **fear**, thinking that what they were seeing was a **ghost**. But Jesus quickly reassures them, telling them that He is the "**I am**." And as **soon** as Jesus steps into the boat, the storm is **over**. Amazingly, after seeing the miracle of the **feeding** of the crowd, and now the second instance of Jesus **calming** the storm, the disciples **still** do not appreciate **who** Jesus is. They apparently are still trying to rationalize things in **human** terms.

By the time the boat reaches shore after daybreak, Jesus and his disciples are **immediately** recognized, and the word spreads **rapidly** throughout the region as people bring their sick **loved** ones to Jesus for **healing**. And as Jesus travels from village to village, even people who merely **touched** the fringe of his garment as He passed by are **healed**. As Jesus noted in one of His discussions with the religious leaders (**John 5:36**), the **works** that Jesus did were a **witness** that He was **indeed** the **Son of God**, the Promised Messiah.