

## Bible Tuesday for Pentecost 10, 2019

### Jeremiah 23:23-29

Am I a God nearby, says the Lord, and not a God far off? <sup>24</sup>Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord. <sup>25</sup>I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' <sup>26</sup>How long? Will the hearts of the prophets ever turn back—those who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart? <sup>27</sup>They plan to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, just as their ancestors forgot my name for Baal. <sup>28</sup>Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the Lord. <sup>29</sup>Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?

The verses preceding this passage are a statement against the crooked leaders and false prophets who are lying to Israel, telling them that, though Babylonia is laying siege to Jerusalem and waging war against the cities of the Southern Kingdom, yet "God will save. All will be well." In fact, charges God, "I am using this foreign army to punish you. You false prophets and false leaders have scattered my flocks and brought this upon yourselves."

"Am I a God nearby and not also a God far off?" – God is stating through the prophet, Jeremiah that God can see the evil, the betrayal that the religious and political leaders are perpetrating, whether they are in the Temple or hiding in their own closets.

The false prophets may well believe they speak for God, but the visionary dreams they claim to have received God did not send. God admonishes Judah to seek the nurturing wheat of God's true word, not the flattering emptiness of the straw of false prophets.

The false prophets arose because Jeremiah and Isaiah and the other true prophets were proclaiming that Judah would fall to Babylonia, just as Israel fell to Assyria. The people of Judah loathed hearing such horrible news so they favored the false prophets. God emphatically states that God's true word doesn't placate, but rather shatters rock and sets falsehood ablaze.

### Psalm 82

God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:

<sup>2</sup>"How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Selah

<sup>3</sup>Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.

<sup>4</sup>Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

<sup>5</sup>They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk around in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken.

<sup>6</sup>I say, "You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you;

<sup>7</sup>nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince."

<sup>8</sup>Rise up, O God, judge the earth; for all the nations belong to you!

This is an interesting psalm in that it uses some ancient aspects of Hebrew tradition and language, making it a little difficult to translate and comprehend.

El & Elohim – these are two ancient words which refer to “god” and “gods” in Ugarit and other very early cultures. The Hebrews eventually coopted them to refer to God as well as “YHVH” which is typically spelled out Yahweh but is in fact a nonsense word used to take the place of God’s name (since God’s name is too holy to ever be uttered by fallen humanity). In the first verse of this psalm, “Elohim” is used twice – “Elohim has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of Elohim he rises to proclaim judgment.” “Elohim” is plural, as in the “royal we”, and is translated both in the singular for God and the plural for lesser gods in this verse.

While none of the commentaries I consulted addressed this, it appears that God is rendering judgment against the lesser elohim who sit with God in seats of power and judgment. God proclaims judgment because of injustice perpetrated against the orphan, the weak, the lowly and the destitute. God demands that those who would be upright should “rescue the weak and the needy, delivering them from the wicked.” Because these neglected and forgotten needy ones are misused, the “foundations of the world are shaken!”

Because of the injustice and abuse wrought by the lesser elohim, God removes their divinity from them and casts them to mortality.

The psalmist celebrates God’s action, acclaiming Yahweh’s sole divinity, which denies a common pagan belief that each nation had a god or goddess which represented them in the divine, heavenly counsel. The goddess believed to represent Rome was “Roma’.

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. <sup>30</sup>By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. <sup>31</sup>By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace. <sup>32</sup>And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—<sup>33</sup>who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup>quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. <sup>35</sup>Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. <sup>36</sup>Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup>They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented—<sup>38</sup>of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. <sup>39</sup>Yet all these, though they were

commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup>since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect. <sup>12</sup>Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

In this last section of the “faith chapter”, the author of Hebrews refers to many people from Hebrew Scriptures, both the Tanakh and the Apocrypha. You may be familiar with David, Gideon, Samson, Samuel, and other prophets. A folk you may not be familiar with is the mother of 7 sons who were raised from the dead and returned to her household in Maccabees. The “better resurrection” being referred to is eternal life, like Jesus, as opposed to coming back to life only to die again like Lazarus and these seven sons. Some of the torture victims are also mentioned in the Apocrypha, while others are assumed to be Jewish folk heroes from post biblical times.

“Great Cloud of witnesses” – It was common in Greek literature of this time to refer to a very large crowd as a “cloud” or a “great cloud”.

“...looking to Jesus” – This is literally translated as “looking away to”, that is, looking away from the sorrow and torture of this world and looking to the First and Perfect child of God, Jesus. The author says that Jesus also looked away from his execution on the cross and looked toward the joy of fulfilling God’s commands and saving all creation.

Luke 12:49-56

I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! <sup>50</sup>I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! <sup>51</sup>Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! <sup>52</sup>From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; <sup>53</sup>they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

<sup>54</sup>He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain’; and so it happens. <sup>55</sup>And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens. <sup>56</sup>You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

This is the gospel of the Lord?

Chapter 12 of Luke, which we have been reading for the past four weeks, is full of difficult teachings from Jesus. The theme of these teachings is “Do not focus on the stuff of this world, the accumulation and management of possessions. Turn away from that to put your energy where it counts, the Kingdom of God.” At first glance, to lifelong church goers, that sounds obvious and mundane. However, if taken to heart, such a dramatic change in priorities can be very divisive.

In is in this chapter that Jesus says things like, “Sell all your possessions, give alms to the poor, then follow me,” and “Let the dead bury the dead. You go proclaim the kingdom of God.” Can you imagine if your parent died and one of your siblings said, “No. I am not coming home for the funeral. You all take care of that. I have to go proclaim the gospel of Jesus.” Your first response would be, “How about your first proclamation site being at Mom’s funeral? How about you tuck your smug self-righteousness in your back pocket and come be a dutiful son/daughter?!” But is that kind of conflict really what Jesus is suggesting? Well, he certainly isn’t supporting status quo!

Throughout the gospel of Luke, Jesus has been announcing the “Kingdom of Heaven/God has drawn near.” Now, as Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem to inaugurate the Kingdom of God with his own public execution, the tension is mounting and Jesus’ stress level is rising. The coming of the Kingdom causes divisiveness and conflict because it requires decision and commitment. Back in chapter 3, John the Baptist prophesied about this very thing, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand.” No lukewarm followers will survive.

Verse 50 can also be translated as, “...How I am totally governed by this until it is complete!” While Jesus discusses what will happen to families and communities, he is, in fact, the first casualty of the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. This also is prophesied by Simeon at Jesus’ baptism, when he says to Mary and Joseph “This child is destined for the rising and falling of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a spear shall pierce your own soul too.” Remember, when Jesus went to his home town to preach, his mom and siblings thought he was “out of his mind” and tried to call him away from the crowd to drag him home. What they must think of him at this point in his life!

While the goal of the Kingdom of God is to proclaim and live The Peace of God, its inauguration is bound to bring several, brutal, at times savage, conflict. Families, friends, and faith communities divide over the question of, “Are you the messiah or shall we look for another,” and how radically changed is life as a faithful disciple of Jesus. Do we allow these words of Jesus to radically change us, or do we follow our culture, and live a Christian life in name only?