

<http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary/BLeant/bLent5.htm>

[Jeremiah 31:31-34](#)

[Psalms 51:1-12 or Psalm 119:9-16](#)

[Hebrews 5:5-10](#)

[John 12:20-33](#)

h above shows Robert N. Murrell, R.B.J. Campbell  
d an unidentified attorney defending Fisk University  
of the students arrested in the Nashville, Tennessee si  
y Miller Smith Papers, Vanderbilt University Special

## **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

31:31 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.

31:32 It 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.

31:33 But 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.

31:34 No 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.

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## **Psalm 51:1-12**

51:1 Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant  
mercy blot out my  
transgressions.

51:2 Wash me thoroughly from  
my iniquity, and cleanse me  
from my sin.

51:3 For I know my  
transgressions, and my sin is  
ever before me.

51:4 Against you, you alone,  
have I sinned, and done what is  
evil in your sight, so that you are  
justified in your sentence and  
blameless when you pass  
judgment.

51:5 Indeed, I was born guilty, a  
sinner when my mother  
conceived me.

51:6 You desire truth in the  
inward being; therefore teach me  
wisdom in my secret heart.

51:7 Purge me with hyssop, and  
I shall be clean; wash me, and I  
shall be whiter than snow.

51:8 Let me hear joy and  
gladness; let the bones that you  
have crushed rejoice.

51:9 Hide your face from my  
sins, and blot out all my  
iniquities.

51:10 Create in me a clean heart,  
O God, and put a new and right  
spirit within me.

51:11 Do not cast me away from  
your presence, and do not take  
your holy spirit from me.

51:12 Restore to me the joy of  
your salvation, and sustain in me  
a willing spirit.

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## **Psalm 119:9-16**

119:9 How can young people

keep their way pure? By  
guarding it according to your  
word.

119:10 With my whole heart I  
seek you; do not let me stray  
from your commandments.

119:11 I treasure your word in  
my heart, so that I may not sin  
against you.

119:12 Blessed are you, O  
LORD; teach me your statutes.

119:13 With my lips I declare all  
the ordinances of your mouth.

119:14 I delight in the way of  
your decrees as much as in all  
riches.

119:15 I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways.

119:16 I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

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## **Hebrews 5:5-10**

5:5 So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you";

5:6 as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever,

according to the order of  
Melchizedek."

5:7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

5:8 Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered;

5:9 and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him,

5:10 having been designated by God a high priest according to



the order of Melchizedek.

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## **John 12:20-33**

12:20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks.

12:21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

12:22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

12:23 Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son

of Man to be glorified.

12:24 Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

12:25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

12:26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

12:27 "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say--' Father, save me from this hour'? No, it

is for this reason that I have come to this hour.

12:28 Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

12:29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him."

12:30 Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine.

12:31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.

12:32 And I, when I am lifted up

from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

12:33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

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**[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect\\_date=3/29/2009](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=3/29/2009)**

**[Jeremiah 31:31-34](#)**

**[Commentary on First Reading by Charles L. Aaron, Jr.](#)**

In the first chapter of this book six verbs define the ministry of Jeremiah: pluck up, pull

down, destroy, overthrow, build and plant (1:10).

Throughout much of the book, the prophet has plucked up, pulled down, destroyed and overthrown as he accused the people of violating the covenant that God had established with them (especially chapter 11). Beginning in chapter 30, the so-called book of consolations, the prophet builds and plants (31:4). These words, whether from the historical prophet or not, were most relevant to the dispirited exiles who desperately needed to be built up.

Among the consolations were the promises that God would relent of anger (30:24) and return the people to their home (31:8). God's love and faithfulness will be manifest (31:3). The people will experience prosperity (31:5) and joy (31:13). All of these are comforting promises to people who need to hear a good word. Such promises would be remarkable enough just by themselves. However, this

particular passage promises even more.

Here, Jeremiah promises a new covenant between God and the people. The offer of a renewed covenant is itself a manifestation of God's forgiveness. These words here push the promise even deeper and in a new direction. Through the words of the prophet, God promises to write the law on the hearts of the people.

Even if God restores the people to the land, enables them to experience prosperity and joy and shows love to them again, that will not be enough. Something must change within the people themselves. Here God promises to heal them from the inside out. God will change not only their outward circumstances, but their very hearts.

The passage contains some technical language that can be unpacked. A covenant is an agreement between two parties. God is in the

position of determining the conditions of the agreement. Usually a covenant involved promises from the superior party in exchange for the proper response from the other party. Here God takes responsibility even for the response from the people. God will empower the people to uphold their end of the agreement.

The word for law can also be translated as teaching or instruction. The usual translation of law is technically correct, but does not carry the sense of grace that the translation "teaching" conveys. The "law" teaches the people how to live in harmony and stability.

As Augustine suggested, the law teaches us how to love. Psalms 19 and 119 reveal the proper attitude toward the law. "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul" (Psalm 19:7). Psalm 119 proclaims that the law is a delight leading to success, even in competition and conflict (Psalm 119:98). Jeremiah

recognizes that something deep within us resists the law and teaching of God. We embrace the foolishness of resistance to God's will. By writing the law/teaching on our hearts, God will bypass that resistance, enabling us to experience the delight, prosperity, joy and harmony that the law provides.

Along with the author of Psalm 51, who implored God to create a clean heart within him and put a new, upright spirit in him, Jeremiah and the psalmist knew that change comes only from the inside out. But, God must take the initiative. We are not as wise as the psalmist so we ask for God to work within us. The psalmist asked only on his own behalf, whereas the prophet envisions God writing the law on the hearts of the whole community. Only when the whole community relishes the law/teaching of God can everyone live in harmony and peace.



This is the reading for the last Sunday in Lent. It may be a time when we are most aware of our inability to follow God's teachings and God's will. If we have been trying to use Lent as a genuine time to grow in obedience, we will realize our weakness and powerlessness to be what God calls us to be. If we have let Lent slip by without a thought to our spiritual growth, then we know we are unwilling even to make the effort.

This promise of God doing for us what we cannot or will not do on our own can then become a welcome word of refreshment. God will write the law on our hearts. Our growth, our sanctification is not all up to us.

We might ask what the prophet had in mind for this passage. When did he think that God would act in this way? Did he think that God's initiative to write the law/teaching on our hearts would be part of the return from exile? Did he have any eschatological expectations?

Did he simply hold out a promise of God's sanctification, knowing our weakness and God's power?

We do not have definite answers to those questions. We can affirm only that our obedience is God's will for us. God will accomplish God's purposes. We claim the gift of the resurrection when God will accomplish God's will for us and for all creation.

We are most ready to hear these words when our own efforts are exhausted. When we are weary of our inner turmoil we are ready to hear Jeremiah. When we are weary of broken relationships and the uncertainty of trusting others, we are ready to hear Jeremiah. When we are weary of our intermittent relationship with God, occasionally close but more likely far away, we are ready to hear Jeremiah. If we have tried to shake off a bad habit or we are tired of trying to improve ourselves, we are ready to hear Jeremiah

## **Psalm 51:1-12**

### **Commentary on Psalm by Robert L. Hubbard, Jr.**

A single voice speaks to us in this text.

Its words ring of agony, pain, desperation, brokenness, and great remorse. The speaker directly addresses God himself, but God says nothing. Instead, this text invites us to eavesdrop on one side of a two-party conversation with God.

Who is speaking? The psalm title identifies the person as David, writing sometime after Nathan condemned him for adultery with Bathsheba (see 2 Samuel 12:1-14). This is possible, but a later editor probably penned the connection between the psalm and that seamy episode. Whatever the case, the title at least offers a powerful and infamous example of the kind of sin the psalm has in mind.

Structurally, the voice opens with heartfelt pleas for mercy and cleansing from sin (verses 1-2) and supports them with a long confession of sin (verses 3-6). A series of pleas for radical renewal (verses 7-12) gives its desperate outcry a powerful, closing crescendo.

## **A Black-and-White Negative**

What immediately grabs my attention are the striking contrasts the speaker's words paint. Before the digital era, cameras shot film, and photos were copied from "negatives" - film with the light/dark polarities reversed. Like the negative of a snapshot, the psalm pictures everything as starkly black and white, the polar opposite of what it should be.

- The dark side of his/her experience - where s/he is now - features "sin(s)," "iniquity," "transgressions," and "evil."

- S/he feels "dirty" and "sinful," i.e., grimy, filthy, and stained.
- The light side of her/his experience-- where s/he wants God to take her/him - features "truth," "wisdom," "purity," "cleanness," and "joy."
- S/he pleads to be "clean," "pure," "washed," "cleansed," and "purified."

I imagine dear Pigpen of the "Peanuts" cartoons and guys in movies who've just brawled in slimy mud and soggy manure. It's an ugly, smelly, foul scene. Emotionally, I feel grimy, filthy, and in desperate need of a bath, too. Whoever the voice is, I know s/he's talking about me! I desperately need cleansing and renewed joy, too.

## **Full Disclosure**

I confess that I'm not a big fan of Lent. Give me Christmas and Easter and I'm a happy Christian! The reason is that I wasn't raised in a Christian clan that observed Lent.

Ironically, however, every Sunday was like Lent, calling me to "get right with God." I took God very, very seriously, but the week-after-week drumbeat gave me a spiritual inferiority complex.

Twice a year, I see my doctor for a physical checkup. He monitors my vital signs and points me in the direction of good health. Today I embrace Lent as an annual spiritual checkup to see where I'm at and to renew my relationship with God. But, please, annually, not weekly!

## **Getting the Color Back in Life**

The stark contrasts drive home another point: the impossibility of self-reformation drives me (with the speaker) back to God. I (and he) do so for two reasons:

- Because God is the one I've (s/he's) so horribly offended (verse 4), the dear, long-time friend with whom I (and

s/he) crave reconciliation.

- Because only God can do the "blotting-out," "cleansing," "ignoring," and "purifying," etc. In computer terms, only God can hit the "restore" key.

## **Hit "Pause" to Ponder**

At this point my mind hits the "Pause" button to ponder what kind of God I (and the psalmist) face. God has said nothing, so I search the psalmist's words for a theological straw or two to grasp. My eyes drift between two key phrases: "Have mercy on me!" (*hanani*, verse 1) and "Cleanse me" (*tehatte'eni*, verse 7).

The first cry reminds me that God is a God of mercy. My mind replays tapes of sinful humans like me voicing that truth:

- That's what Moses tells Israel camped near the Jordan (Deuteronomy 4:31).
- That's why a guilty David casts his fate in God's (rather than his enemies') hands (2 Samuel 24:14).
- That fuels the climactic cry of hope by the prophet Micah (Micah 7:18-20).
- That's why God sent Jonah to Nineveh (Jonah 4:2).
- That underlies Jesus' climactic cry on the cross for forgiveness (Luke 23:34).
- That drives Paul's dramatic declaration about "no condemnation" (Romans 8:1).

In short, God's ears eagerly scan the world's chatter to hear someone cry "Have mercy, O God!"

The second cry reminds me that God is a God of restoration. "Cleanse" (verse 7) puns on the root *hata'* ("to sin") and its multiple appearances in the psalm. In verse 4, the voice confesses "Against you... have I sinned" (*hata'* basic stem), but in verse 7 it pleads "Cleanse



me" (*hata'* intensive stem). The pun works like the English words "contaminate" and "decontaminate." The biblical speaker pleads: "I've sinned, so please de-sin me."

That de-sinning has huge results:

- The stains and grime are "blotted out" - no longer visible, and no longer offensive.
- The grime is gone, replaced by vivid color - bright snow-like "whiteness" (verse 7b).
- God need no longer "hide [his] face" from their offense (verse 9).
- I feel the promised "joy" and "gladness" alongside the "cleanness" (verses 8a, 10a).
- Once "on the outs" (verse 11a), God and I are friends again.

## **"Lent For Dummies"**

I may not like Lent, but this is what Lent does

for me: I humbly hand myself over to God - to be sure, filthy, broken, and in despair - and he lovingly "restores" me to his favor. I feel good about myself, and life gleams with joyous, bright, vivid color! I bask again in the warm sunshine of his love and glimpse afresh the cheery radiance of his smile

That's something worthy doing every year - but not every week!

## **Hebrews 5:5-10**

### **Commentary on Second Reading by Dwight Peterson**

While Hebrews will be read three times during Holy Week, and then for several weeks beginning with the Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost,

this is the first Sunday this year where we encounter Hebrews in the lectionary. It's a

good idea, then, to remind ourselves about some basic issues of introduction.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the fact that the King James Version ascribes Hebrews to Paul, it was almost certainly not written by him. Indeed, the identity of the author is a puzzle about which no consensus exists (this lack of consensus is no modern invention; it goes back to the early centuries of the church).

Hebrews seems to have been written sometime in the last third of the first century A.D., and while it is often called "The Epistle to the Hebrews," it is not, in fact, a letter. Instead it is a sermon - its unknown-to-us author calls it a "word of exhortation" (13:22).

It looks like the author might have had a particular community in his sights when writing this sermon (see 13:22-25), but it's not at all clear where that community was located (Palestine and Rome are the most prominent

alternatives). What does seem clear is that the original audience had suffered some persecution (10:32), and some members either had or were considering turning their backs on the faith (see 6:4-6). This portrait of the original community, suffering in some way and in danger of wavering in their faith, may provide a point of contact with our own communities.

The Greek of Hebrews is particularly fine. The sentences can be long and complex with lots of grammatical subordination. Because English has a harder time than Greek in dealing with this complexity, most English translations are forced to obscure the complexity of the Greek by dividing its long sentences into shorter ones. This makes for a more readable translation; but it can get in the way of interpretation.

The complexity of the Greek of Hebrews mirrors the complexity of its argument, which

is intensely exegetical and beautifully non-linear. In other words, it interprets passages from the Old Testament in sometimes thrilling and often mystifying ways, and its topics are treated in multiple places. The final effect is less like connect-the-dots and more like an intricate tapestry. It's important, therefore, to situate our passage within a larger context.

Hebrews 5:5-10 is the second half of a larger unit that begins at 4:14. This larger passage looks backward to passages earlier in Hebrews. It expands on the idea of a "merciful high priest," introduced in 2:17. And the quotation from Psalm 2:7, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you," reprises the first Old Testament quote in the book (1:5).

In Hebrews 4:14-5:10, Christ is compared to the high priests from the Old Testament and shown to be *like them*. The high priest makes atonement for sin (5:1), is able to sympathize

with the people because he shares their weaknesses (5:2-3), and becomes a high priest by being called by God (5:4). Christ is *like* the high priests in all these ways. He was appointed by God (5:5-6). He sympathizes with our weakness (4:15). And, presumably by making atonement (see Hebrews 9), he gives us access to mercy and grace from God, eternal salvation (4:16; 5:9). The only difference between Jesus and the high priests is sin. Jesus is without it (4:15) but they have to make atonement for their own sin (5:3).

The passage also looks forward, especially by referring to Melchizedek in 5:6, 10. The author of Hebrews doesn't do much with Melchizedek here. Indeed, the quotation of Psalm 110:4 in Hebrews 5:6 serves as a proof text supporting the claim that Jesus was appointed high priest by God and did not thrust himself forward on his own account. But this little seed, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek," grows out of all

proportion in chapter 7 when Hebrews *contrasts* Jesus to the Aaronic high priesthood and finds Christ *superior* to Aaron.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. At this point in the argument, Christ is more *like* the high priest than *unlike*. Contrasts, both to the high priest and to the whole system of sacrifice, will follow in later chapters.

Perhaps the most significant characteristic of this particular passage - and what makes it particularly apt for the fifth Sunday in Lent - is its emphasis on the humanity of Jesus.

Verses 7-10 in Greek are a relative clause, a clause that begins with the word "who." The person to whom the "who" refers is "Christ" in verse 5. In other words, verses 7-10 describe the Christ who did not glorify himself in becoming high priest, but was instead appointed to that position by God.

These verses are a single sentence in Greek

(note that the NRSV has it divided into two) with two main verbs: "learned" in verse 8, and "became" in verse 9. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, "learned obedience through what he suffered," and as a consequence "became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." Jesus Christ, whom Christians would later call the Second Person of the Trinity, "learned obedience through what he suffered!" This is how God works in the world through Christ: not by overpowering his enemies with force and victory, but by suffering.

As Lent approaches its climax in Holy Week, the story of Jesus descends into suffering of the most intense kind: betrayal by friends, conviction by an unjust court, torture and execution by the cruelest of methods. Christ truly did learn obedience through what he suffered. And in so doing he "became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." This is the heart of the Gospel. And the author of Hebrews knew it.



## **John 12:20-33**

### **Commentary on Gospel by Audrey West**

Matters of life and death have a way of focusing one's attention.

It has not been long since Lazarus, still wrapped in grave cloths and smelling four days dead, stumbled out of the tomb and into the waiting arms of his sisters and friends. Now that life is getting back to normal (can life ever be normal after somebody is raised from the dead?), one might expect the focus to turn to the impending feast of Passover. However, even that greatest of festivals cannot hold a candle to the Light of the World, who has, after all, just brought his friend from death to life with only a heavenward glance and the strength of his voice.

That is precisely what troubles the Pharisees.

They and the rest of the religious establishment are powerless against this Galilean man who claims to have come from the Father in heaven.

Already many of the Jews are believing in him. Before too long, the Pharisees fear, *everyone* will follow after him, causing the Romans to come and destroy their temple and the nation (John 11:45-48) and strip them of their authority. Their worst fears are confirmed when the crowds who had been at Lazarus' tomb begin to testify. "Look," the Pharisees exclaim, like the representatives of a failed ad campaign, "the world has gone after him!" (John 12:19).

## **We want to see Jesus**

In our pericope the world is focused on Jesus to such an extent that even some Greeks - could they be among the sheep who are not from the fold? (10:16) - are anxious to lay eyes on him. They engage in a little first-century

social networking with Philip, the disciple with the Greek name, a person whom Jesus had "friended" near the start of his earthly ministry (1:43). And it is no wonder they want to see Jesus. After all, he has been inviting folks to "come and see" from the very beginning (1:39).

Plus, there is the matter of all those signs, of which the raising of Lazarus is only the most recent. It is easy to imagine how seeing water turned to wine or a man given his sight would lead people to believe in and follow One who can do such things (see 4:48; 6:30; 11:45). Seeing is believing in this Gospel (6:14, 30; 19:35; 20:27), so when the Greeks ask to see Jesus, they are, perhaps, expressing their desire to believe. Whether they are successful in meeting Jesus we are not told, but Jesus' response to their query refocuses the terms of the discussion.

No longer is it enough to come and see Jesus;

from "this hour" forward his followers are invited to come and *be* with Jesus.

### **Whoever serves me must follow me**

At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus invites his disciples to "follow me" (1:43), and he promises the "light of life" to those who do follow (8:12). However, on more than one occasion, he tells some of "the Jews" that they cannot come where he is going (7:34; 8:21).

Later during this Passover festival, he says the same thing to his disciples (13:33).

Nonetheless, it is clear that a time will come when they *will* be able to follow him (13:36).

Indeed, he says, he will go first "and prepare a place for you," and then "come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may also be." (14:3).

Making it possible for his followers to abide together with him seems to be a core purpose of Jesus' ministry, as he prays to God that "I desire that those also, whom you have given

me, may be with me where I am" (17:24).

### **Where I am, there will my servant be also**

Where is Jesus? He is with the Father (1:1; 14:11), and he dwells among us (1:14; 14:23). He is leading his followers to eternal life as he moves toward the hour of his death (12:32-33). Before much longer he will be "lifted up" on the cross (12:32, 34; 8:28) where he will lay down his life for his friends (15:13). Even as a grain of wheat falls to the earth in order to fulfill its true purpose, Jesus is lifted up from the earth in order to fulfill his, so that he may draw all people to himself. (12:24, 32). It is there, at the cross, that we will see his glory (17:24).

### **The hour has come**

Following Jesus is a matter of life and death. Or, to put it another way, life and death matter to those who follow Jesus.

During this season of Lent we follow him all

the way to Golgotha, all the way to the cross, where we will stand beneath it, together with those followers who asked at the beginning of his ministry, "Where are you staying?" (1:38). It is there, in the face of the world's many ways of death (e.g., poverty, economic collapse, hunger, sickness, war) that we are drawn even closer to Jesus. It is there, in the light of the stark reality of life at its end that we begin to catch a glimpse of life at its fullest.

Jesus promises, "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself" (12:32). It is for such a time as this that Jesus has brought us to this hour. There is nothing like impending death to focus our attention.

**<http://www.montreal.anglican.org/comments/blnt5m.shtml>**

**Jeremiah**

From Chapter 1, we know that Jeremiah was either born or began his ministry in 627 BC. During his life, Babylonia succeeded Assyria as the dominant power in the Middle East. He was a witness to the return to worship of the Lord (instituted by the Judean king Josiah), and then (after Josiah's death in battle in 609), the return of many of the people to paganism. When Babylon captured Jerusalem in 587, Jeremiah emigrated to Egypt. God called him to be a prophet to Judah and surrounding nations, in the midst of these political and religious convulsions.

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### **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

This prophecy was written after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. V. [30](#) says “all shall die for their own sins”: collective sin, in which descendants were punished for wrongdoing, will be replaced by *generational* or personal sin: punishment will no longer extend beyond a lifetime. God promises to “make a new

covenant” (v. [31](#)), with the whole people, both Israel and Judah. It will be unlike the covenant made at Sinai, which the people “broke” (v. [32](#)), even though God was their “husband” or *master*. The law, once written on stone tablets, will be written “on their hearts” (v. [33](#)) – the people will be faithful, and following the Law will be a matter of individual conscience and will power. Teaching (v. [34](#)) will no longer be needed because all will “know the Lord”, for each will recognize him in all actions, in every situation: each will approach God in a godly way. God will forgive them for turning against him (“iniquity”) and forget all their deviations from his way. In vv. [36-40](#), we read that this agreement will last for ever, and that “the days are surely coming” when God’s people will be so numerous that Jerusalem will need to be enlarged.

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## **Psalms**

Psalms is a collection of collections. The



psalms were written over many centuries, stretching from the days of Solomon's temple (about 950 BC) to after the Exile (about 350 BC.) Psalms are of five types: hymns of praise, laments, thanksgiving psalms, royal psalms, and wisdom psalms. Within the book, there are five "books"; there is a doxology ("Blessed be ... Amen and Amen") at the end of each book.

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## **Psalm 51:1-12**

This psalm speaks of rebuilding Jerusalem (v. [18](#)), so we know that it was written during, or shortly after, the Exile. The emphasis is on an *individual's* sin, and prayers for personal pardon and restoration. The psalmist seeks cleansing from "iniquity" (vv. [2](#), [9](#)) and "sin(s)". The notion of lifelong sinfulness (v. [5](#)) is also in Genesis [8:21](#): "... for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth" (although the psalmist may simply be confessing that he has been thoroughly sinful.) In v. [6](#), he knows that

God will seek truth in his very being; this is where he will receive understanding (“wisdom”). Perhaps v. [8b](#) says he is ill – because of his sin. He even asks God to *hide his face from his sins* (v. [9](#)), to be so gracious and compassionate as to *turn a blind eye*. May God restore him, bring him back to godliness, give him a clear conscience, a “clean heart” (v. [10](#)), “new” “right” (God-oriented) “spirit”. Only God can purify. May God give him joy and sustenance, through his “holy spirit” (v. [11](#)).

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## **Psalm 119:9-16**

This is the second stanza (of 22, one for each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet) of the longest psalm. Each of the eight verses of this stanza begins with *beth*, the second letter. The whole psalm is in praise of the Law (the expression of God's covenant with humankind in the Old Testament) and of keeping it. The emphasis is on the love and desire for the word of God in Israel's law, rather than on *legalism*.

As in other stanzas, various words are used for law; here they are "word", "commandments", "statutes", "ordinances", "decrees", and "precepts". Cleansing (v. [9](#)), joy (vv. [14](#), [16](#)) and meditation (v. [15](#)) are key notions. Knowledge and wisdom are more to be desired than "riches" (v. [14](#)). The psalmist seeks to avoid sin, and to live in God's ways.

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## Hebrews

Apart from the concluding verses (which may have been added later), this book is a treatise (or sermon) rather than a letter. Its name comes from its approach to Christianity: it is couched in Judaic terms. The identity of the author is unknown; Origen, c. 200 said that "only God knows" who wrote Hebrews. The book presents an elaborate analysis, arguing for the absolute supremacy and sufficiency of Christ as revealer and mediator of God's grace. Basing his argument on the Old Testament, the author argues for the superiority of Christ to the prophets, angels and Moses. Christ offers a superior priesthood, and his sacrifice is much more significant than that of Levite priests. Jesus is the "heavenly" High Priest, making the true sacrifice for the sins of the people, but he is also of the same flesh and blood as those he makes holy.

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## Hebrews 5:5-10

The author has spoken of the Jewish high priesthood; he has said that a (human) high priest was “put in charge of things pertaining to God” (v. [1](#)), on behalf of the people, to offer sacrifices for their sins. Since he himself from time to time offended God by sinning unintentionally, “he is able to deal gently” (v. [2](#)) with others who commit such sins, and “must offer sacrifice for his own sins” (v. [3](#)) as well. Further, one could only become a high priest when called by God – “one does not presume to take this honour” (v. [4](#)).

Now the author tells us how Jesus, whom he sees as a high priest, is like (and unlike) a Judaic high priest. Jesus too was called by God (v. [5](#)): some manuscripts of Luke [3:22](#) record that, at his baptism, the “voice” speaks the words quoted here. But Jesus, per Psalm [110:4](#), is different: he is a priest “forever” (v. [6](#)). (“Melchizedek” is mentioned in Genesis 14:17-

20; there he brings bread and wine, and blesses Abram. In Hebrews, he resembles the Son of God and lives for ever: he is a supernatural figure foreshadowing the eternity of the Son of God – see 7:2-3.) During Jesus’ earthly life (“the days of his flesh”, v. [7](#)), he prayed to God, to the one who could deliver him from death. But, although he was already God’s “Son” (v. [8](#)), he “learned obedience”, he obeyed the will of the Father, he submitted *reverently* (v. [7](#)): this involved suffering and death. But the Father did hear his plea: he rose again from death. He was then “made perfect” (v. [9](#)): his priesthood was completed in his sacrifice for the sins of us all, and he was raised to be with the Father. In this way, he brings salvation to all who follow him. This salvation is forever (unlike the limited duration of that brought by Judaic high priests). He is high priest for ever.

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## **John**

John is the fourth gospel. Its author makes no attempt to give a chronological account of the life of Jesus (which the other gospels do, to a degree), but rather "...these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." John includes what he calls signs, stories of miracles, to help in this process.

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### **John 12:20-33**

At the time of the Passover (“the festival”), some Gentiles (“Greeks”) travel to Jerusalem, probably because they believe in God. Their request “to see Jesus” (v. [21](#), to understand his message), is conveyed to him by “Andrew and Philip” (v. [22](#)), the two disciples with Greek names. Jesus takes this opportunity to announce that his “hour” (v. [23](#)), his time of self revelation, determined by God, has come. He can now tell what it means for the Son to be glorified. When Jesus is glorified, then all people will truly be able to see him. but this is not the time for interviews.

He uses an example from nature to speak of the significance of his death: the paradox that a “grain of wheat” (v. [24](#)) only bears fruit after it seems to have died and has been buried. Jesus’ death makes possible salvation for others. That the meaning of life eludes those who *live it up* is also a paradox; self-centeredness ends up destroying a person. (“Hate”, v. [25](#), is a Semitism for *love less*.) Serving Jesus involves following his example;



this will be honoured by the Father (v. [26](#)). In v. [27](#), Jesus struggles with his impending death: should he ask the Father to free him from the need to suffer and die? No, he says: such avoidance would negate his mission; his death is God's will (v. [28a](#)). The voice from heaven reassures: his lifework and teaching have been signs of God's glory, of his power and presence; God will act again in raising him. The crowd miss the point of the message (v. [29](#)), so Jesus tells them that God has spoken so that they may believe that he comes from God; he already knows this ("not for mine", v. [30](#)). This is when ("now", v. [31](#)) those who willfully turn away from him ("this world") are condemned (it is they who are judged, not him), and when the devil ("the ruler of this world") ceases to have power over people. When he is "lifted up from the earth" (v. [32](#)), i.e. crucified and exalted in glory, salvation of all will be possible. This is the paradoxical "kind of death" (v. [33](#)) he will endure.

<http://www.montreal.anglican.org/comments/blnt5l.shtml>

**Author's note:**

*Sometimes I have material left over when I edit Comments down to fit the available space. This page presents notes that landed on the clipping room floor. Some may be useful to you. While I avoid technical language in the Comments (or explain special terms), Clippings may have unexplained jargon from time to time. A hypertext Glossary of Terms is integrated with Clippings. Simply click on any highlighted word in the text and a pop-up window will appear with a definition. Bibliographic references are also integrated in the same way.*

## **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

*Verses 23-40:* Chapters [26-35](#) foretell the restoration of Israel. These verses, occurring after a section on the restoration of northern Israel and before one on the restoration of Judah (the south), contain a number of short oracles (prophecies) on a similar subject. Here both Israel and Judah are included. [[NJBC](#)]

*Verses 31-34:* Using the oldest expression for covenant making (“to cut a covenant”) and opposing what was an increasingly limited concept of the Sinai covenant, the prophet affirms that God “will make a new covenant” (see also [32:38-40](#); Hebrews [8:8-12](#); [10:16-17](#)) inscribed in the hearts of his people (see also [17:1](#); Ezekiel [11:19](#); Hosea [2:20](#)). [[NOAB](#)]

The old and new covenants have much in common: both were initiated and concluded by [Yahweh](#); both are centred on God; both are with the Israelites; in both, human response is in terms of the Law. So the newness is not in the essentials of the covenant but in the realm

of its realization and of its means. It will not be broken (as the old one was often), for all will be faithful to it. This will be so because of a fundamental change in the very being of humanity: humans will be created anew.

Recalling that the Israelites saw the *heart* as the seat of intelligence and will power, we see that the *newness* is in God making them able to fulfil God's plans. This prophecy had a great influence. Ezekiel and [Deutero-Isaiah](#) wrote of an *eternal covenant* which cannot be broken (see Ezekiel [16:60](#); [34:25](#); [37:26](#); Isaiah [55:3](#); [61:8](#)), possible because a *new heart* is created in people; a *new spirit* is given to them: see Ezekiel [11:20](#); [18:31](#); [36:36](#); Isaiah [59:21](#). [NJBC]

*Verse 31*: “new covenant”: The only occurrence of this phrase in the Old Testament. It occurs in the [Qumran literature](#), but there it means nothing more than the Mosaic covenant, with strong legalistic tendencies. It is reinterpreted in the New Testament: see Luke [22:20](#) (the Last Supper); 1 Corinthians [11:25](#) and

Hebrews [8:8-12](#). [[NJBC](#)]

*Verse 31:* “house of Judah”: Because only the “house of Israel” is mentioned in v. [33](#), it appears that “house of Judah” was added by a later editor to make clear that the new covenant extends to the entire people. [[NJBC](#)]

*Verse 32:* See Exodus [19:1-24:18](#) for the Sinai covenant. For it being written on stone tablets, see Exodus [31:18](#); [34:28ff](#); Deuteronomy [4:13](#); [5:22](#). Exodus [24:7](#) and 2 Kings [23:3](#) speak of it being written in a book. [[CAB](#)] [[NJBC](#)]

*Verse 33:* “after those days”: An expression frequently found in Jeremiah (see, for example [7:32](#); [9:24](#); [16:14](#)). It has an [eschatological](#) tone, speaking of a discontinuity in Israel’s history through a wonderful intervention by [Yahweh](#). [[NJBC](#)]

*Verse 33:* “on their hearts”: i.e. the new covenant will be directly accessible to their wills and consciences. [[CAB](#)] Jeremiah is the first to tell of writing on hearts, although

there are close parallels in Deuteronomy: see [6:6](#); [11:18](#); [30:14](#).

*Verse 33*: “I will be their God”: This covenantal clause is found elsewhere in this book and in other books: see also [7:23](#); [11:4](#); [24:7](#); [30:22](#); [31:1](#); [32:38](#); Ezekiel [11:20](#); [36:28](#); Zechariah [8:8](#); Leviticus [26:12](#). [[NJBC](#)]

*Verse 34*: “teach”: There will no longer be intermediaries such as Moses, priests and prophets - for [Yahweh](#) will intervene directly. [[NJBC](#)]

*Verse 34*: “know”: i.e. the practical recognition of God in every action and situation – an attitude in life. [[NJBC](#)]

*Verses 35-37*: This passage comes from a time after Jeremiah's: see also [33:14-16](#). Here the seemingly eternal cycle of nature (see also [5:22](#)) is used to emphasize God's assurance of Israel's continued existence: see also Isaiah [44:24](#); [54:9-10](#). [[NOAB](#)] This prophecy evokes the stability of the laws of nature to prove the

same stability of God's purposes in the history of Israel. See also Genesis [8:22](#) and Psalm [89:35-38](#). [[NJBC](#)]

*Verse 36:* The new covenant will be as durable as the universe itself. [[CAB](#)]

*Verses 38-40:* These verses are also from after Jeremiah's time: see also Zechariah [14:10-11](#). They speak of the rebuilding of the whole of Jerusalem. The boundaries are:

- the four corners: "Hananel" at the northeast (see also Nehemiah [3:10](#)), "the Corner Gate" at the northwest (see also 2 Kings [14:13](#)), the southeast and the southwest ("Gareb" and "Goah" – both unidentified), and
- the boundaries on the south ("Hinnom" – see also [7:31-32](#)) and on the east ("Wadi Kidron" – see 2 Kings [23:4](#), [6](#)).

The "Horse Gate" was at the southeast corner. See also 2 Kings [11:16](#); Nehemiah [3:28](#).

[[NOAB](#)] [[NJBC](#)]

In these verses the *newness* is in the purification of the Ben-Hinnom Valley, long the site of child sacrifice (see [19:1ff](#)). The size of the city is that at the time of the destruction of the city by the Babylonians and during the rebuilding under Nehemiah. [NJBC](#) sees these verses as a post-exilic addition.

### **Psalm 51:1-12**

*Superscription:* “A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone into Bathsheba”: The psalm itself nowhere refers to the story of David and Bathsheba.

Although v. [8](#) makes it clear that the psalmist’s problem is one of illness, the main emphasis is upon restoration to moral, rather than merely physical, health. [[NOAB](#)]

*Verse 1:* “Have mercy on me”: Psalms [56](#) and [57](#) also begin with these words.



*Verse 1:* “steadfast love ... abundant mercy”: “Steadfast love” also occurs in [69:13](#), [16](#); Isaiah [63:7](#); Lamentations [3:32](#), Nehemiah [13:22](#).

*Verse 1:* “blot out ...”: This recurs in v.

*Verse 5:* “born guilty”: Psalm [58:3](#) says that “the wicked go astray from the womb”. See also Isaiah [48:8](#). The psalmist confesses to having had a sinful nature even from the moment of conception. [[NOAB](#)]

*Verses 6-12:* Renewed prayer for deliverance. [[NOAB](#)]

*Verse 7:* “Purge me with hyssop” : This may refer to some ceremony of sprinkling of blood or water, using branches or a bush. The reference may be metaphorical. In preparation for the first Passover, the Israelites were to take “a bunch of hyssop”, dipped in blood, and touch their doorways with the blood: see Exodus [12:22](#). See also Leviticus [14:51](#). [NOAB](#) sees it as definitely metaphorical.

*Verse 10:* “Create”: The Hebrew word is *bara*;

this word is also used in Genesis [1:1](#). Creating is an action proper to God; only he can do the purification.

*Verse 10: “clean heart”*: Literally *fidelity in that which is secret*, i.e. the depths of his being.

*Verse 10: “right spirit”*: God’s action in humans which saves them and keeps them faithful. Ezekiel speaks of a new heart and a new spirit (see Ezekiel [11:19](#), [36:27](#)). Jeremiah also speaks of a new spirit (and a new covenant) in Jeremiah [24:7](#), [31:33](#).

*Verses 13-17*: The psalmist says: when you give me your joy, I will instruct and praise God – rather than offer sacrifice in thanksgiving. By *instruct* he means *proclaim my experience publicly and thus lead sinners back to God*. [[NOAB](#)]

*Verses 18-19*: [NOAB](#) believes that this psalm may date from David’s time, and that these verses was added later to modify the anti-

sacrificial spirit of vv. [13-17](#) and to adapt the psalm to liturgical use.

## **Psalm 119:9-16**

Other alphabetical acrostic psalms are [9-10](#); [25](#); [34](#); [37](#); [111](#); [112](#); [145](#). The predominant mood of lament suggests that it may have been composed as a prayer for deliverance from trouble, though the language may be merely imitative and the whole a purely literary exercise in honour of the written law. It is a very late composition. [[NOAB](#)]

This psalm is often described as a [wisdom](#) psalm. [[NJBC](#)]

This psalm praises God for having given the Law to his people, and records the sustaining, renewing, hopeful and admonitory roles that the Law fulfills in their lives. [[CAB](#)]

*Verse 1*: “Happy”: The conventional translation of a Hebrew expression meaning literally *the happiness of*. 1:1-2 says : “Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or

take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the LORD ...". [[NOAB](#)]

## **Hebrews 5:5-10**

*4:14-5:14*: The author resumes the theme of Jesus our high priest. In [2:17-18](#), he speaks of Jesus as “a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God”. Jesus has two qualifications of a priest: divine appointment (see [5:4](#)) and the ability to “sympathize with our weaknesses” (see [4:15](#)). [[NOAB](#)]

*4:14*: “great high priest”: [Philo](#) uses this designation for the Logos (the “word” of John [1:1-14](#)) in his writings. Elsewhere in Hebrews, Christ is simply the “high priest”. He may include “great” here because he is making a comparison. [[NJBC](#)]

*4:14*: “who has passed through the heavens”: That Christ was pre-existent is meant. [1:1-2](#) say: “God ... has spoken to us by a Son, ... through whom he also created the worlds”.

Note the plurals. The Greek word translated as “worlds”, *aion*, can also mean *ages*. There appears to be the concept of a number of worlds, the visible and the invisible, the latter being several heavens. [2 Enoch](#) 3-20 also speak of multiple heavens. [[NJBC](#)]

4:15-16: Because Christ experienced real, human testing, he is able to “sympathize with our weaknesses”. [[NOAB](#)]

4:15: “tested as we are, yet without sin”: The author says that the only difference between Jesus’ temptations and ours is that he did not succumb to them. [[NJBC](#)]

4:16: At God’s “throne of grace” (see also [8:1](#) and [12:2](#)) humans “receive mercy” for past sins and “find grace” for present and future “need”. [[NOAB](#)] Here the author thinks of the confident access to God that has been assured by the redemptive work of Jesus. [[NJBC](#)]

5:1: “gifts and sacrifices”: To [NOAB](#), grain and animal sacrifices; however [NJBC](#) thinks that

no such distinction is intended. As Chapter [9](#) shows, the author is principally concerned with the Day of Atonement rite as the Old Testament *type*. [[NJBC](#)]

5:2: The Old Testament provides no atoning sacrifice for deliberate and defiant sins (see Numbers [15:30](#) and Deuteronomy [17:12](#)), only for sins committed unwittingly – by the “ignorant and wayward”: see Leviticus [4](#). Numbers [15:30](#) says “But whoever acts high-handedly ... affronts the LORD, and shall be cut off from among the people.” “Cut off” means *shall receive the death penalty*. [[NOAB](#)]

5:2: “deal gently”: The Greek word corresponds to a term of Stoic philosophy signifying *the right mean between passion and lack of feeling*. [[NJBC](#)]

5:4: “Aaron”: In Exodus [28:1](#) God chooses Aaron and his sons as priests. [[NOAB](#)]

5:5: “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”: This is also found in Psalm [2:7](#), so the

author may be reinterpreting this psalm in Christian terms, as was often done with Psalm [110:4](#). [[CAB](#)]

5:6: Psalm [110](#) begins: “The LORD [[Yahweh](#)] says to my lord ...”. In Judaism, “my lord” is David, but early Christians reinterpreted it as Christ; thus *God the Father says to God the Son*, the Lord. So “you” here is Christ. In Hebrews [7:1-10](#), the author deduces from Genesis [14:17-20](#) (where King Melchizedek of Salem, a “priest of God Most High”, brings out “bread and wine” and blesses Abram, and in return receives a tithe from him) that this mysterious priest-king was greater than either Abraham or his descendant Levi. [[NOAB](#)]

5:6: “the order of Melchizedek”: i.e. According to the rank which Melchizedek held. [[NOAB](#)]

5:7-8: Note that one trait Jesus does not share with the Judaic high priest is “weakness” (v. [2](#)). In [7:28](#), the author specifically contrasts Jesus with the Jewish high priest in this

respect. It is important, however, to note that the contrast applies to the present exalted state of Christ. While on earth, Jesus experienced the weakness of human nature, especially its fear of death. Exalted, he can sympathize with those who are weak. Paul's concept is similar: "he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God" (2 Corinthians [13:4](#)). [[NJBC](#)]

5:7: Jesus' agonizing prayer in Gethsemane (see Mark [14:32-42](#)) "was heard" in the sense that "he learned obedience" by submitting to the divine will – which involved death.

[[NOAB](#)] Some scholars see here a reference to more than just this one incident. [[NJBC](#)]

5:8: "Although he was a Son": The author considers Jesus' sonship in two different ways:

- He became Son when exalted, and
- He was always Son because he existed with the Father even before he appeared on earth.



Later theology said that the resurrection-exaltation gave Jesus' human nature full participation in his divine nature. The two concepts are entirely compatible. [[NJBC](#)]

5:8: "he learned obedience": Learning through suffering is a common motif in Greek literature. In the New Testament it occurs only here, in Romans [5:19](#) and in Philippians [2:8](#). [[NJBC](#)]

5:9: "made perfect": Jesus completed his divinely appointed discipline for priesthood. This phrase is characteristic of this letter (see also [2:10](#); [7:19](#), [28](#); [9:9](#); [10:1](#), [14](#); [11:40](#); [12:23](#)) and means *made complete, brought to maturity*. [[NOAB](#)] The Greek word, *teleosis*, is used in the [Septuagint](#) translation of priestly consecration, translating a Hebrew phrase *to fill [the hands]*: see Exodus [29:9](#), [29](#), [33](#), [35](#); Leviticus [16:32](#); [21:10](#); Numbers [3:3](#). This cultic notion of perfection is certainly present in Hebrews. [[NJBC](#)]

5:9: "eternal salvation": The author uses the

word “eternal” here and in [9:12](#), 14,15; [13:20](#) (but not in [6:2](#)) to speak of realities that endure because they belong to the heavenly sphere, which is characterized by permanence, as opposed to the transitory realities of earth. [\[NJBC\]](#)

### **John 12:20-33**

After two contrasting scenes of the anointing of Jesus and his entry into Jerusalem, there follows an episode which deals with the contrasting reactions of Gentiles (vv. [20-36](#)) and of Jews (vv. [44-50](#)) to the impact of Christ on Jerusalem. [\[BlkJn\]](#) This section is the conclusion of Jesus’ public ministry. [\[NOAB\]](#)

*Verse 20: “some Greeks”:* [Josephus](#), in *Jewish Wars* 6.9.3, reports that *God-fearing* Gentiles came to Jerusalem to worship at Passover. [\[NJBC\]](#)

*Verse 21: “Philip”:* Meaning *lover of horses*. [\[NOAB\]](#) He responds to Jesus’ command “Follow me” in [1:43-48](#). Jesus tests Philip in

## 6:5-7. [NJBC]

*Verse 22:* Philip's hesitation is natural enough. He must have known that Jesus had little to do with Gentiles, and no vocation to any ministry towards them. In Matthew 15:24, when a Canaanite woman comes to Jesus seeking a cure for her daughter, Jesus responds "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel". [BlkJn]

*Verse 22:* "Andrew": Meaning *manly*. He was also from "Bethsaida" (v. 21). [NOAB]

*Verse 23:* "The hour has come": So far we have been told that Jesus' time has not yet come. [BlkJn] His final manifestation was at the cross: see 7:30 ("no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come"); 8:20; 13:1; 17:1. [NOAB] Jesus speaks to the disciples. [NJBC]

*Verse 24:* By means of a parable, Jesus explains how his death will enable the Gentiles to see him. In 1 Corinthians 15:36

Paul writes: “What you sow does not come to life unless it dies”. See also Mark [4:8](#), the parable of the sower. [[BlkJn](#)] This saying was probably a common proverb, which John has probably shaped to the situation by emphasizing the fact that the seed *remains alone* above ground. [[NJBC](#)]

*Verse 25:* In Mark [8:35](#), Jesus foretells that “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it”. See also Matthew [10:39](#); Luke [9:24](#); [14:26](#). [[BlkJn](#)]

*Verse 25:* “love their life ... hate their life”: The Greek word translated “life”, *psuche*, means *the essence of being*. [BlkJn](#) considers that the plain contrast of “loves” and “hates” sounds more probably authentic than Mark’s “want to save their life” and “lose”.

*Verse 26a:* Service to Christ means sharing his lot, whatever that may entail. A similar thought is found in Mark [8:34](#): “If any want to become my followers, let them deny

themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”. [[BlkJn](#)] The identity of Jesus and his followers will be emphasized in the farewell discourse: see [13:13](#), [16](#); [15:20](#). [[NJBC](#)]

*Verse 26b:* The follower who shares Jesus’ suffering will also share the honour that God gives him. In [17:24](#), Jesus prays: “Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world”. [[BlkJn](#)] This idea reappears in the love language of the farewell discourses: see [14:23](#) and [16:27](#). [[NJBC](#)]

*Verses 27-30:* These verses remind us of the Gethsemane story in the [Synoptic](#) gospels: see, for example, Mark [14:34-36](#). [[NJBC](#)]

*Verse 28:* “Father, glorify your name”: Jesus prays that he may completely accept his Father’s will. In the Old Testament, both the glory of God and his “name” are means whereby God is made known to be what he is.

(See, for example, Exodus [33:18-22](#).) God will thus make himself known through the death of Christ. [[BlkJn](#)]

*Verse 28:* “a voice came from heaven”: As at Jesus’ baptism (see Mark [1:11](#); Matthew [3:17](#); Luke [3:22](#)) and at his transfiguration (see Mark [9:7](#); Matthew [17:5](#); Luke [9:35](#)), and at Paul’s conversion (see Acts [9:4](#)). [[BlkJn](#)]

*Verse 29:* “thunder”: In the Old Testament, thunder is recognized as the voice of God. Exodus [19:19](#) tells us that “Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder”. See also Psalm [29:3-9](#). Gentiles would also recognize thunder as an omen. [[BlkJn](#)]

*Verse 31:* “the ruler of this world”: He rules *de facto* because people have delivered themselves into his power by becoming slaves to sin. Elsewhere he is called “the evil one” (in 1 John [5:19](#)), “the devil” (in John [8:44](#)), and “Satan” (in John [13:27](#); Revelation [12:9](#); [20:2](#)). In 1 Corinthians [2:6](#), [8](#), Paul calls him “the rulers of this age”. [[BlkJn](#)] Satan as ruler of

the world in its opposition to God is a frequent figure in the [Qumran literature](#): see 1QM (War Scroll) 1:1, 5, 13; 4:2; 11:8; 1QS (Rule of the Community) 1:18; 2:29; 3:20-21. [[NJBC](#)]

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[Deep in Our Hearts \(Mar. 23-29\)](#)

By iucc on Friday, March 20, 2009 :: 2413 Views

■ **Sunday, March 29**

Fifth Sunday in Lent

## ■ **Focus Theme**

Deep in Our Hearts

## ■ **Weekly Prayer**

God of suffering and glory, in Jesus Christ you reveal the way of life through the path of obedience. Inscribe your law in our hearts, that in life we may not stray from you, but may be your people. Amen.

## ■ **All Readings For This Sunday**

Jeremiah 31:31-34 *with* Psalm 51:1-12 *or*  
Psalm 119:9-16 *and*  
Hebrews 5:5-10 *and*  
John 12:20-33

## ■ **Focus Reading**

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. It 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. But 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. No 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.

## ■ **Reflection and Focus Questions**

by Kate Huey





## Focus Questions

There are many stories in the Old Testament about covenant, from Noah and the rainbow through Abraham and Sarah and their many descendants (including us) to Moses and the people at the foot of Mt. Sinai. In this week's beautiful reading, the prophet

1. What is your best image for God?

2. Have you ever done anything purely "for God's sake"?

3. In what ways has the church been faithful to God's covenant? In what ways have we failed?

4. If this covenant is with a people, how does our private faith need to be experienced in the life of a community of faith?

5. What does Holy Saturday mean to you? Do you feel as if you



Jeremiah speaks of a covenant written not in rainbow or stone, not external, but written deep inside, on the very hearts of the people.

Rescue and release ... restoration and return.... Jeremiah speaks of God's promises to the people of Israel while they are still in captivity, still in exile, steeped in loss and grief that have broken their hearts and their spirits, too. Jerusalem, their great city, has been destroyed and their conqueror Babylon has carried away their leaders to the far-off capital of its powerful empire. By this 31st chapter, Jeremiah is no longer scolding the people for their sin and their lack of faithfulness to God. Instead, he brings the people a new message from God, good news, a word of comfort and hope. God has had compassion on the people; God's heart has been touched by their suffering, and God forgives them.

In this time of exile God makes sweeping

promises to the people of Israel, promises of restoration and return and, most importantly, of relationship, too. Once again, as in so many covenant stories before this one, God promises to be in relationship with the people--like God's promises to Noah, to Abraham and Sarah, and to Moses and the people at Sinai-- God promises to be a presence with the people, abiding with them, and promises that they will even belong to each other: God says, I will be your God, and you ... you will be my people.

Even though they have broken the covenant God made with them back there in the desert, at Sinai with the Ten Commandments, God is using words like "new" and "heart" and "covenant" once again. The great scholar of the Old Testament, Walter Brueggemann, calls this the "core memory" of Israel about God: that God will do today, in this bad circumstance, what God has done in the past. God will give a new covenant, a new

relationship, a new creation. God doesn't do these things merely out of some kind of stubborn faithfulness but out of deep, wounded love and profound grief that have moved God beyond anger to tender caring. It's a thing of the heart, really: God decides this time that the law will be written not on stones, on something external, but inside, deep inside the people, written on their hearts.

There's a thought-provoking translation question in verse 32, when either "husband" or "master" could be used, as in "a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband" or "though I was their master." There have been many times in human history where the distinction between the two has not been great, but most of us resist equating the two. In any case, neither word defines or adequately describes God.

**God as a loving but frustrated parent**

It seems to me that the feeling of this part of the Book of Jeremiah, the Book of Consolation as it's called, reminds us much more of God as a parent. As a parent (and former child/teenager) myself, I can really relate to how frustrated God must have felt when the people kept messing up. I also understand the whole thing about God being really mad and then being moved suddenly and deeply to love and compassion when God remembers how much God loves the people. For example, in this same 31st chapter of Jeremiah, there are exquisite lines that remind us of a mother's love: "Is Ephraim [another name for Israel] my dear son? Is he the child I delight in? As often as I speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore I am deeply moved for him; I will surely have mercy on him" (v. 21).

Isn't it interesting how often we contrast the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New, with the former being harsh and

punishing and angry, and the latter being a much "kinder and gentler" God? And yet, we've just established in this text (as in many others) that God has great love and compassion for the people of Israel. The mystery, however, is much richer, much more complex than that.

### **"Core testimony" v. "counter-testimony"**

Here we are, deep in Lent, approaching Holy Week. Remember that "core testimony" in the Old Testament about God's love and faithfulness? Brueggemann says that the core testimony is in tension with a "counter-testimony" of Israel's abandonment, exile, loss, and suffering, suffering that they attribute to God's judgment on them. Core testimony, counter-testimony. Brueggemann says that many people think that Christianity has moved "beyond this tension to affirm a complete identification of God's power with God's love"; in other words, we're all about the



kinder, gentler God who is all love and not so angry and unpleasant. We tend to base this claim on the crucifixion of Jesus, when, as he puts it, "God's own life embraces the abandonment of broken covenant." So, we Christians, then, start with the God of the Old Testament who is compassionate and merciful and that's where we end, too, on Easter Sunday, with victory-and-new-life-and-everything-is-just-going-to-be-fine-now. The trouble is, if we emphasize Easter Sunday and forget about, or deny Good Friday, we are claiming, Brueggemann says, "an easy victory that does not look full in the face at Friday and its terrible truth."

And so, he says, we look again. We see that the Good Friday/Easter Sunday experience of reconciliation in our Christian faith is anticipated in the Old Testament in these very stories of exile and return, of captivity and rescue and release and restoration. The people of Israel knew what it was to suffer, to

feel abandoned, to feel lost. And they also knew what both suffering and healing felt like, what it felt like to be forgiven, what it felt like to be lost, and then found, what it felt like to be exiled, and what it felt like to come home.

## **The same God in both Testaments**

What Brueggemann is pointing out, then, is that the core testimony, about God's love and mercy, and the counter-testimony, about abandonment and judgment, are in both the Old and the New Testaments. The faith of Israel and the Easter affirmation of the church, he says, are both grounded in the belief that the God who judges is the God who brings home to wellbeing. We do love to say that we're an Easter people, but maybe, in light of this tension between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, we ought to take another look at what lies between them, another look at Holy Saturday.

Holy Saturday is the day that gets skipped over in our Holy Week observances; it was the empty day, when I was growing up, after the sadness of Good Friday but before the joy of Easter Sunday. Holy Saturday has been called "the longest of days," a day of waiting, a not-yet, in-between time that in many ways describes our own lives. We know about Good Friday and the cross, about sorrow and death. All humankind knows about suffering, brutality, and injustice, about tragic endings, about death, all of which are part of the human condition. We Christians also know about Easter Sunday and the promise, the hint of resurrection for the rest of us, because Jesus is risen from the dead. This "Sunday experience" is all about hope.

Our lives are not all about Good Friday or all about Easter Sunday. We know suffering and abandonment, exile and loss, and we face death, our own and the deaths of those we

love. We know ourselves as sinners, and our lives as broken. Yet we also taste forgiveness, we taste hope, and we taste new life, we catch sight of it here and there, get word of it, listen and wait and hope. We remember that we are dust, and to dust we shall return, and yet we know ourselves also as bound for glory ... pain and hope, dying and rising again ... all humankind waiting, waiting, here in the unresolved, waiting ... and we understand a little more why faith is best described as trust.

Brueggemann thinks about all of this and finds the unresolved in the New Testament just as much as in the Old. He observes that, as the Old Testament ends with the words, "Let us go up," our New Testament ends with the prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus!" When we remember, as Jesus commanded us to, we say, "Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again." Here we are, living our lives in that in-between, Holy Saturday-feeling time, the longest day indeed.

## **Living in the in-between time**

And so we turn again to God, the God of both the Old Testament and the New, with our broken spirits and our sins, our homesickness and loneliness, our hunger for justice for a suffering world, our lost vision and lost hope, the very fabric of our hearts torn open, and we listen for that Stillspeaking God to address us with words of comfort and consolation, words of rescue and release, of restoration and homecoming. We are captives, in many ways, of very different sorts of empires today, empires of materialism, militarism, and greed. And yet, paradoxically, we walk in freedom, too, as people of a covenant written deep on our hearts; we walk in freedom in this in-between time, responding to the call to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God, to love God with our whole being and our neighbor as ourselves.

Jeremiah addresses the people's suffering with words of comfort and hope, not just long ago but today as well. We live in a transitional time, somewhere beyond "post-modern" but not yet called anything, and the times are "a-changing" so fast that we'll have moved on to another "new age" before this period has even been named. We live, they say, in uncertain times. But what time, we might ask, has ever been "certain"?

"Covenant" has been described as something that each party enters for the sake of the other. Not for one's own protection or rights, but for the sake of the other. We know that's true of God, but is it true of us? Parker Palmer says that the "true" covenant "means the acceptance of weighty obligations to a Lord who demands that we 'do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.'" The church's acceptance of this true covenant, he says, would "serve as a channel of reconciliation in a world in love with divisions.... The church

would proclaim not its mastery over the world but its servanthood--to God, to humankind, and to the vision of a peaceable kingdom." Would the world say that we are faithful partners in this covenant?

## ■ For Further Reflection

*Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 20th century*

There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love.

*Paul Pearsall, 20th century*

The heart may be where God's intelligence or logic is expressed within us.

Weekly Seeds is a source for meditation and prayer based on the readings of the "Lectionary," a plan for weekly Bible readings used in Protestant, Anglican and Roman Catholic churches throughout the world. When we pray and study the Bible using the Lectionary, we are praying and studying with

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**Jeremiah 31:31-34**

**Psalms 51:1-12**

**Hebrews 5:5-10**

**John 12:20-33**

**Jeremiah 31:31-34**

The Jeremiah passage brings to a conclusion the series of reflections on covenants that have occupied the First Testament readings during the Lenten season. God's promise to deal with sin not by destroying it but by creatively transforming it—given to Noah, amplified in Abraham, codified by Moses, and tested in the wilderness—is transformed once more in Jeremiah's vision of a covenant written in faithful people's hearts. This new

covenant will not be imposed on the people from without, but will arise spontaneously from within, grounded in an intuitive knowledge of God: “No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the LORD,’” Jeremiah foretells, “for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD.” This new covenant will bring a new degree of intimacy with God: where the Mosaic covenant was filtered through a metaphor of God as the “husband” of the people (vs 32), the new covenant will bring direct relationship: “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (vs 33). And the intimate knowledge of God granted in the new covenant will be moral as well as intellectual, a disposition of the will as much as a renewal of the understanding, inasmuch as the heart-covenant will originate in God’s gracious forgiveness of iniquity and sin. The new covenant, therefore, will complete the movement begun with the covenant with Noah: God’s way of dealing with sin will not be

destruction, but forgiveness and intimate relationship that will transform sinners *from within* toward greater satisfaction of God's aims and ideals for the world.

### **Psalm 51:1-12**

The psalm selection echoes the theme of transformation-from-within sounded in Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant. The psalmist acknowledges sin and separation from God: "I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight"; the psalmist even seems to feel such sin is not incidental, but is constitutive of his very being: "Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me." The only possible remedy for such sin is transformation from within: "You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart." The poem uses language of purgation and washing, but in the end it is more intimate images that convey the central meaning: "Create in me a clean heart, O God,

and put a new and right spirit within me... do not take your holy spirit from me.” The longing for a transformed life expressed in the psalm serves as a devotional complement to the prophetic promise in the Jeremiah passage.

### **Hebrews 5:5-10**

The passage is part of a larger section of the Letter to the Hebrews in which Jesus is named as the great high priest of the new covenant. It seems chosen for this Sunday largely in connection with the brief mention of Jesus’ soul being “troubled” in the Gospel. Here the “trouble” in Jesus’ soul is described as “loud cries and tears” with which Jesus “offered up prayers and supplications” in fulfillment of his priestly role. What is unique about Jesus as priest, according to the epistler, is that he is both priest and victim, both *offerer* and *offering*: “When Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come... he entered into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with

his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption” (9:11-12). That means that Jesus’ “suffering” as priest is both expiatory, connected to his role as sacrificial victim, and exemplary, connected to his own intimate relationship with God as Son. Jesus suffered death on the cross as the ultimate sacrifice for sins, of course; but more importantly, in the epistler’s view, it was through this suffering Jesus “learned obedience” and “reverent submission” and so was “made perfect.” And having been made perfect, Jesus can now invite into that same intimate, saving relationship with God “all who obey him.” That is, Jesus in his “obedience” and “submission” willingly conforms himself to God’s aims for him, and in so doing provides a model that others can feel and follow in conforming their own lives to divine aims as well. This sort of “obedience” is not a simple accession to an external and heteronomous authority, such as the “covenant with the ancestors” in the Jeremiah passage; but this

“obedience” is the result of internalizing divine aims and seeing one’s personal aims in relation to them; it is a discovery of autonomy-in-relationship with God; it is the “service that is perfect freedom.” Jesus’ priestly service, including his self-offering in suffering, is therefore the exemplary fulfillment of the promise of the new covenant written in the heart.

### **John 12:20-33**

The Gospel passage assigned for this day is a sort of “hinge” between the end of Lent and the beginning of Passiontide next week. Jesus and his disciples have come to Jerusalem for the Passover when some Greek-speaking Jews, also in town for the festival, come to Philip, himself from a Greek-speaking region, and ask to see Jesus. When Jesus is told of their request, he responds “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” We saw last week that in John’s vocabulary Jesus’ being “glorified” includes both Crucifixion and Resurrection, and it is that sense of “glory”

which informs Jesus' discourse in the following verses. Two sayings are paired: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" and "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." Process-relational interpretation can draw some specific meanings from these sayings. In process thought, the universe is composed of moments of feeling which arise from an impulse from God, unify in themselves all sorts of shades and nuances of feeling derived from the world, become what they are, and then perish. In perishing, each moment yields up its particular feeling of the universe, so that the feeling can be felt by new moments yet to arise. Unless the moment perishes, it cannot bear fruit as a constitutive contributor to new moments. From a process perspective, dying-and-arising is a fact of life in the universe, a reflection of the way all things are and the way all things become. What is unique

about Jesus' passion and resurrection is not simply the pattern of dying-and-arising, but the way his *whole person* is taken up into that pattern, the way his entire self-constitution is attuned to the successive satisfaction of ever-richer divine aims. This utter devotion is the pattern of Jesus' life, and so is the defining characteristic which Jesus makes available to be felt and followed in the self-constitution of moments of experience in the lives of those who follow him. That is why Jesus says: "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also." Although our devotion to divine aims is not so whole as Jesus', we do in fact experience perishing and transition in the moments of our lives, and so we can even now follow Jesus in the way that leads to larger life. "Coming to this hour," being "lifted up" to reveal this mystery of dying-and-arising as a *personal* possibility for larger life in relationship with God, is the heart and purpose of Jesus' mission; this is why Jesus will not pray "save



me from this hour,” even though he is “troubled” by the knowledge of the suffering that awaits him; instead, Jesus prays that his own dying-and-arising will glorify God’s name, that is, that it will be accepted by witnesses as the pattern of God’s aims for the lifting up of all people. Today’s Gospel passage thus serves to sum up the themes of Jesus’ ministry given to us in Lent, and to turn our attention ahead to the Passion and Resurrection stories of Palm Sunday and Easter.

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**[http://wiki.faithfutures.org/  
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## **Lent 5B**

### **From Faithfutures**

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## Revised Common Lectionary

- Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Psalm 51:1-12  
(or Psalm 119:9-16)
- Hebrews 5:5-10
- John 12:20-33

## Introduction

In the older liturgical cycles, this Sunday marked the beginning of **Passiontide**. During this solemn period, veils of purple cloth or plain white linen were once placed over

religious symbols that celebrated the victory of Christ. In many cases, even plain crosses and those with the image of the Crucified One on them, were also covered as the significance of the veiling was lost. While many parishes continue to veil their crosses from this weekend, contemporary practice treats Palm Sunday as "Passion Sunday," with red as the liturgical color.

As we get closer to Easter there is considerable convergence in the major western lectionaries:

- **Jeremiah 31** is a passage that speaks of a new covenant God and the people, one inscribed on the human heart with the divine law internalised and no need for an external religious teacher.
- **Hebrews 5** is one of the NT passages that makes use of the esoteric traditions concerning Melchizedek.
- The passage from **John 12** is one of

the most enigmatic sections of John's Gospel, but includes the metaphor of the seed that generates a new head of grain only if it first dies and is laid in the ground.

## **Unless a grain of wheat falls ...**

In keeping with the ancient observance of this day as the beginning of Passiontide, today's readings begin to focus much more directly on the imminent liturgical commemoration of the suffering and death of Jesus.

GJohn treats the crucifixion as a moment of triumph, rather than a tragic turn of events. This will be "the hour" -- an important theme in GJohn: 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; and 17:1. This will be the moment of victory since a Jesus exalted on the cross will draw everyone to himself.

There is no sense here of the scandal of the cross, that Paul felt so strongly. Despite the

presence of the "Greeks" in the episode, this is insider talk. Unlike Paul who knew the difficulty of seeking to sustain theological discourse with either Jews or Greeks when the question of Jesus' death was raised, GJohn seems to be talking to its own constituency here. We might well wonder whether they seriously imagined themselves in dialogue with outsiders, or whether their monologues and narratives are mostly for their own benefit. A kind of theological whistling in the dark, perhaps?

In a happy turn of events, even if written primarily for their own internal needs, GJohn has generated numerous expressions that have come to encapsulate core elements of Christian faith:

- No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above ...
- God so loved the world that he sent his only son ...

- God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth ...
- I am the bread of life ...
- I am the light of the world ...
- I am the good shepherd ...
- I am the resurrection and the life ...
- I give you a new commandment, that you love one another ...
- I am the way, the truth and the life ...

Another of the great Johannine word pictures is to be found in this passage: the seed that falls (seemingly dead) into the ground and then bears much fruit. This image is taken up in the hymn, *Now the Green Blade Rises*, by John M.C. Crum (1872-1958):

Now the green blade rises from  
the buried grain,

Wheat that in dark earth many  
days has lain;  
Love lives again, that with the  
dead has been;  
Love has come again, like wheat  
that springs up green.

In the grave they laid him, Love  
whom hate had slain;  
Thinking that he never would  
awake again,  
Laid in the earth like grain that  
sleeps unseen;  
Love has come again, like wheat  
that springs up green.

Up he sprang at Easter, like the  
risen grain,  
He who for the three days in the  
grave had lain;  
Raised from the dead, my living  
Lord is seen;



Love has come again, like wheat  
that springs up green.

When our hearts are wintry,  
grieving, or in pain,  
Then your touch can call us back  
to life again,  
Fields of our hearts that dead  
and bare have been;  
Love has come again, like wheat  
that springs up green.

The saying about losing or retaining one's life (vs. 25) reflects traditions that are also found in the Synoptic Gospels: see [063 Saving Ones Life](#). This can be a timely reminder that while GJohn has a distinctive perspective on Jesus and Christianity, it is not entirely cut off from the early Jesus traditions. John may well preserve authentic snippets of Jesus' sayings even if they are now embedded in a longer

discourse created by the author or his sources.

The final part of the passage (vss. 27ff) has echoes of the Gethsemane prayer vigil prior to his arrest. When GJohn deals with the Gethsemane scene, we have a calm and confident Jesus reviewing his divine origins with his Father, and interceding for those later generations of Christians who would come to believe as a result of the preaching of the disciples. The conflicted and agonizing Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels has no place in GJohn, except for this episode here.

The incident then develops as something of a parallel to the Baptism and Transfiguration accounts. The heavenly voice assures Jesus that all is well, but this time the witnesses are not simply John the Baptist or even the inner circle of Peter, James and John. Instead, there is a crowd of bystanders who hear the divine voice, although only Jesus is said to have understood its message.

# A New Covenant?

The OT reading concludes the series of covenant passages that has been a feature of the Lenten series:

Lent 1: Noahic covenant between God and "all flesh upon the earth"

Lent 2: Abrahamic covenant

Lent 3: Mosaic covenant from Mt Sinai

Lent 4: Covenant failure: punishment and restoration (Numbers 21:4-9)

Lent 5: The "new covenant"

The idea of a "new covenant" was to be especially significant in early Christianity, and eventually provided the name for the Christian set of writings within the Bible. Our focus, however, is better directed at the significance of this development in the Jeremiah tradition.

The "historical Jeremiah" appears to have lived through the implementation (and

eventual failure) of the so-called deuteronomistic reforms that were introduced in the Kingdom of Judah during the reign of Josiah. For details, see 2 Kings 22-23. These reforms were inspired by the kind of traditions now found in Deuteronomy, with some scholars suggesting that the "book of the Law" found in the Temple during renovations to remove pagan symbols (such as the bronze serpent that featured in last week's readings) was more or less what we now have in Deut 12-26.

In supporting the reform agenda of Josiah (see Jer 11:1-17), Jeremiah seems to have fallen foul of the rural priests such as those from his home town of Anathoth (see 11:21-23). With the suppression of sacrifices outside the Temple, the rural clergy were deprived of both income and status. In the end the reforms failed and the southern kingdom was defeated by the Babylonians.

What is especially significant about this

passage in Jeremiah 31 is the way it assumes and transposes the older covenant traditions.

Jeremiah had seen for himself that religious renewal was not a matter subject to official mandate, but rather something that had to come from within. He dreams of a time when the divine Torah will be inscribed on the hearts of people, rather than remaining an external influence. As part of that dream for a new kind of relationship with God and with one another, Jeremiah imagines a time when there is no need of priest or teacher, since everyone will know God directly.

It is a measure of Jeremiah's spiritual stature and maturity that he could even contemplate such a situation. Not many religious leaders since then have been able to embrace that vision of an autonomous laity. The idea of a "brokerless kingdom" is central to Jesus' vision of the divine commonwealth, but it put him into direct conflict with the religious authorities of his time. That was also the

experience of Jeremiah, whose story seems to end with him being abducted by a group of refugees fleeing Jerusalem for safety in Egypt (see Jer 43:5-7).

## **Jesus in Hebrews: A priest like Melchizedek?**

Hebrews is one of the most unusual documents in the NT. It consciously reinterprets Jesus in terms drawn from Jewish Temple ritual, and describes him as a priest. This is a revealing development, as it shows us how far from historical reality early Christians were willing to move in their desire to explore the religious meaning of Jesus.

More authentic Jesus traditions show him to have been something of a critic of the Temple and its related system of purity codes. He was executed partly because of his known criticisms of the Temple, including an ambiguous threat to destroy it and replace it

with the "true" Temple expected to descend from heaven at the end of time.

Rather than presenting Jesus in his true colors as an apocalyptic prophet critical of the Temple establishment, or as a charismatic holy man renowned for his witty sayings and his skills as a healer/exorcist, Hebrews portrays Jesus as the mythical Melchizedek. This figure first appears in the story of Abraham (Genesis 14) as a local ("pagan") priest who accepts Abraham's offerings upon his safe return from a military campaign. His name occurs in Psalm 110, in an even more obscure reference that is then taken up by the author of this letter.

For ancient texts that mention this figure, see the [Melchizedek](#) page

Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls we now know that there was continuing speculation about this Melchizedek figure in Jewish priestly circles, including those such as the Qumran covenant community that was

estranged from the Temple because of a dispute about calendar calculations, and other issues. In these circles, Melchizedek (= "king of righteousness," or "the just king") is an angel of light, and is sometimes opposed to an evil power known as Melchiresha ("king of evil," or "the evil king").

With the insights into esoteric Jewish speculation provided by the Dead Sea Scrolls, we can now appreciate how Hebrews represents a way of developing a Christology that is inspired by the special interests of the ancient priestly circles in Jerusalem. Like Christians of other times and places, the writer of Hebrews has imagined Jesus in the guise of the things most precious to him. We all like to imagine Jesus as being like us.

## **Jesus Database**

For texts related to these readings, along with brief notes and commentary, see the following items in the [Jesus Database](#):



- [359 Pagans Visit Jesus](#) - (1) John 12:20-36a
- [361 Hour Of Glory](#) - (1) John 12:20-24,28-34
- [063 Saving Ones Life](#) - (1) 1Q: Luke 17:33 = Matt 10:39; (2) Mark 8:35 = Matt 16:25 = Luke 9:24; (3) John 12:25-26
- [203 Prayer Against Temptation](#) - (1a) Mark 14:32-42 = Matt 26:36-46 = Luke 22:39-46; (1b) John 12:27; (1c) Pol. Phil. 7:2b; (2) Ap. Jas. 4:1b

<http://www.preachingpeace.org/yearb/lent5.htm#Ganthro>

## **Gospel Anthropological Reading**

Jesus as the rejected and

crucified Son of Man has popped up again and again in our lectionary readings, from Advent through Lent and of course, on through Holy Week when we 'celebrate' the death and resurrection of Jesus. The death of Jesus is not a theme imposed upon the text. It permeates the text and is the hermeneutic by which the text gives itself to be understood. We cannot emphasize this enough.

It is commonplace to read the gospels through the same royal ideology with which we regard

the gods of mythology. In this view, Jesus is no more than a god stretched to the “Nth” value.

Jesus is stronger, mightier, more powerful and demonstrates that power as Judge, Jury and Executioner at the eschaton.

Therefore, we must live in fear and have a healthy respect for the moral judgments of this God.

The gospels do not move in this direction. The first thing the gospels do is point us to a dying and forgiving Jesus. He is the one who announces the character of the Creator, a character so

different from the gods of religion. This abba abounds in love, overflows with joy for his children and gives them all good gifts. This God, the maker of heaven and earth is, for Jesus, the wonderful life giving God. Sin, death and the devil are only his business in relation to his redemptive work on our behalf. In him there is no shadow of turning, in him there is no darkness at all. In short, God does not have a shadow side.

With apologies to our Calvinist friends, we question any notion

that separates the revelation of the Father from the person of Jesus (as in the so-called extra Calvinisticum). We also note the problem of Luther's 'deus absconditus (hidden God). This is the derived Platonic god that has haunted Christianity from the second century.

[An issue that faced Luther and Calvin was the looming authority of Augustine and his doctrine of election. No matter which way you slice it, the dualism that has permeated this doctrine and its influence has

created havoc for the Reformers and their heirs, indeed all in the West. Little wonder that our God feels, looks and acts just like all the other gods.]

While there is certainly mystery and wonder in the Creator abba, there are no secrets, no hidden agendas. Everything is revealed. And what is revealed? That our God can kick the you know what out of the other gods, as in the story of Elijah and the priests of Ba'al? If that is the God that Jesus reveals, then why did Jesus not call down legions of

angels at his arrest? If this is so, why did God not deliver Jesus from the clutches of the angry mob and their rulers? If this is so, then why, when God raised Jesus from the dead, did Jesus not come back and smite his enemies? Why in the world would he appear to his disciples announcing “Peace”, the very message he announced before he died? No, this retaliatory god is not the abba of Jesus, nor the God in whom we believe.

Some might say “Jesus’ role as judge won’t come until the End.”

But if Jesus is ‘the same yesterday, today and forever,’ at what point will we finally realize that this “Judge Jesus” is as two faced as Janus? When will we discern that all of our christological and theological problems occur when we insist on seeing Jesus through the lens of the gods of religion rather than seeing the gods of religion and their violence exposed in the cross?

What are we being shown in the gospel? We are shown our own propensity for mimetic conflict



and its resolution through scapegoating violence, and God's transformation of this mechanism for our salvation. Some may object and say that this does not speak to their situation. They're not violent, they were not there when Jesus died. These folks believe that they would never have harmed Jesus, they would have listened and obeyed. But the proof in the pudding is in the fact that we continue to treat others just like we would treat Jesus. We all have our scapegoats; people we

would prefer to see removed from the planet. We have all tasted hate.

This Son of Man who is exalted is for us the preeminent sign of the glory of God. But users of this website are unlikely to be able to identify with him as the victim, without first seeing themselves and their own mimetic tendencies in the mob and in the rulers. (Those who can reasonably see themselves in the victim probably don't have internet access.) As we have pointed out previously, this way

of reading the gospels has been aptly described as a ‘repentant reading.’ (Hamerton-Kelly, *The Gospel and the Sacred*). Using this hermeneutical insight in tandem with Bonhoeffer’s “view from below,” we came away with a hermeneutic in which human suffering plays as important a role as any ‘historical-critical’ insight.

## **Gospel Historical/Cultural Questions**

Today we call upon three authors for their insights into our text.

Is today's text a bit like the Gethsemane story of the Synoptics? Raymond Brown offers additional evidence for the historical credibility of the Fourth Gospel. Regarding this text Brown says, "We need not jump to the conclusion that John presents us with a dismembered form of the Synoptic agony scene. It is quite probable that Jesus underwent an experience of agony in the face of death as described in the Synoptic scene, for this is not the type of incident the primitive Church would

invent about its glorified master. Yet, since there were no witnesses to report the prayer of Jesus during the agony (the disciples were asleep at a distance), the tendency would be to fill in the skeletal framework of the Gethsemane scene with prayers and sayings uttered by Jesus at other times. Therefore, the Johannine picture where such prayers and sayings are scattered may actually be closer to the original situation than the more organized Synoptic scene.” (Brown, The Gospel according to

John)

Our point in citing Brown is two-fold. First we believe that the Synoptic tradition is shaped by the apocalyptic orientation of the early Church. Kasemann suggests that ‘apocalyptic is the mother of early Christianity,’ and we are inclined to agree (New Testament Questions for Today) But, Jesus was not the apocalypticist that scholarship of the last 100 years has tried to make him out to be. Apocalyptic is language that Jesus employs, but he uses it as a meta-map and

is constantly out of step with what the general populace and the ruling authorities believe regarding apocalyptic events. Therefore, the Johannine portrait of Jesus shares much with those portraits of Jesus that debunk the 'apocalyptic Jesus', e.g., Marcus Borg's *Jesus: A New Vision* or Raymund Schwager's *Jesus Of Nazareth: How He Understood His Life*. Neither of these authors use the Johannine Gospel as they both write within the bounds of the modern critical consensus that only the

Synoptics may be used to discern the historical Jesus. Given this, it is all the more important to note the conjunction between the portrait of Jesus in John and some contemporary work on Jesus, for as we have observed all along, both John and Mark share the same core perspective.

We do not often reflect on the experience of Jesus' rejection and suffering. It will always be difficult to understand Jesus' 'agony' as long as we continue reading the gospel from the perspective of the one that



persecutes, the one who lashes out. Brown's observation that Jesus had a 'real experience of agony' makes simple sense. Anyone who has undergone tremendous loss knows the soul-searching questions that are asked during this time of crisis. Jesus' response here and in the Synoptics, even if heavily edited and mediated through layers of tradition, indicates a real person struggling with real issues and questions.

With regard to the prayer itself, we turn to B.F. Westcott: "If then

the words be taken as a prayer for deliverance it is important to notice the exact form in which it is expressed. The petition is for deliverance out of and not for deliverance from the crisis of trial. So that the sense appears to be 'bring me safely out of the conflict' (Heb 5:7), and not simply 'keep me from entering into it.' Thus the words are the true answer to the preceding question. 'In whatever way it may be thy will to try me, save me out of the deep of affliction.' There is complete trust even in

the depth of sorrow. (St. John).

Finally, we quote F.F. Bruce with gratitude for his insight:

“In its final  
reaction to him,  
the world  
would pass  
judgment on  
itself and  
reveal its true  
character: who  
then would  
stand for him  
and who would  
be against him?  
But the world’s

judgment on  
Jesus, directed  
by the sinister  
spirit-ruler  
(archon) of the  
present order,  
would be  
overruled in a  
higher court;  
that spirit-  
ruler himself  
would be  
dislodged, for  
universal  
authority and  
judgment have

been vested by  
the Father in  
the Son (John  
3:35; 5:19-29),  
and the present  
order is about  
to be replaced  
by the eternal  
dominion of life  
and truth (17:2;  
18:37f). It is  
from the cross  
of Jesus that  
the true light  
shines  
brightest; men

declare  
themselves to  
be sons of light  
or sons of  
darkness  
according as  
they come to  
that light or  
avoid it, and  
this is the  
'krisis' (cf. 3:19-  
21, 12:45F).  
The 'archon' of  
this world is  
the adversary  
of the Son, but

finds no  
accusation to  
bring against  
him (cf. 14:30).  
He is the  
adversary also  
of those who  
believe in the  
Son, but  
against his  
accusations  
they are to  
receive the  
powerful aid of  
the Paraclete,  
whose presence

will be to them  
the evidence  
that ‘the ruler  
of this world  
has been  
judged’ (16:11).  
That ruler’s  
dethronement,  
then is effected  
by the death  
and  
resurrection of  
the Son and  
confirmed by  
the coming of  
the Spirit.”



## (The Gospel of John)

### **Gospel So What?**

As we approach Holy Week, we are aware of the power of violence regardless of the scale, from domestic conflicts to international wars. From the school bully to the boorish tyrant we are reminded that violence is a poison. Our contemporary problem is that violence is seen as the remedy to violence. It is both poison and remedy (pharmakon and pharmakos).

The simple logic we use with our children when we raise our voices or our hands is applied on a grand scale in our modern world. I am bigger than you, I can beat you up, I can hurt you. Therefore you must refrain from violence.

To preach the cross of the Son of Man is to reject this way of thinking. This is the satanic way, the way judged in the cross of Jesus. The death of Jesus did not solve any problems for the religious authorities. In a scant thirty years they would find

their authority crushed by the Romans. What the death of Jesus did do was produce a movement that would learn to live together. And for all of their disagreements, they would learn to love one another and care for one another and in many cases, be exiled or executed for their faith in this anti-god (remember that the most leveled charge against the early Christians was that they were atheists).

The world can no longer afford for the Church to hide the Gospel under a bushel. The gospels are

encouraging us all of the time to reconsider what it is we think we have learned about Jesus and his God. May God show us mercy when we say things about him that may well be true of all the other gods but are not true to His revelation in Jesus.

2006:

From our perspective it is really simple: we are either interpreting the text sacrificially or we are interpreting it non-sacrificially. It doesn't matter whether we are conservative, liberal, left, right or center, RC,

Nazarene, Lutheran, Anglican or anything else. We either read the biblical text 'from below' or 'from above.' We either join the mad chorus of victimage and announce the wrath of God or we join the victim and announce the salvation of God.

It's all about what you interpret, how you interpret it, why you interpret it, where you interpret it and when you interpret it. We pray that the Trinitarian discussions of the twentieth century will pay off in christological conversations in

the twenty-first century  
mirroring the fourth and fifth  
centuries of the early church.

## **Epistle Anthropological Reading**

Thus far in Lent we have looked  
at passages that relate primarily  
to the saving work of Christ in  
his death and resurrection. Our  
text today continues this theme  
but takes us back a step, to the  
garden in Gethsemane. But it  
also takes us into the present by  
affirming that we have a  
mediator in the present before  
the Father, the *Christus*

*praesens.*

It is one thing to say that Christ died for our sins. All Christians affirm this in one way or another. But the work of Christ is not limited to the past, nor to the eschatological horizon of the future. Jesus acted in a priestly manner not only in his life and death but also now acts as our priest in his session at the right hand of God.

When we approach God, we do not approach a God who is distant or unfeeling, lofty and beyond our concerns. Our God is

no watchmaker who creates the universe and sets it in motion, witnessing human history with the detachment of a scientific observer. Nor is our God remote, so far out there that human life, human choices, human interactions, human relations do not matter to her/him. Our God has taken on our flesh and blood, lived in poverty and marginalization, was killed as a common criminal. Our God knows the struggles, pains and heartaches as well as the joys, elations and jubilations of



human experience. In short, while we have a God who is unlike us (in that God is not bound to the mimetic contagion of violence), we also confess that we have a God who is like us in every way, who knows the human experience fully and completely.

Christ's mediatory work was not something he conjured up one day. He did not say, "I think I will function as a high priest, as one who has the right to enter the presence of divinity and atone for sin." Rather he was

called to that task by the One who sent him, thus our author cites Psalm 2:7 as an indication that Jesus' priestly work was a vocation given him by God. In all he does, he does as a fulfillment of God's will not his own and this includes his intercession on our behalf. This is significant for it affirms that Jesus' work for us is not to be seen as something he does while the Father would wish instead to crush and burn us; what he does he does at the urging of the entire Godhead.

Just a few verses previous (4:14-16 NIV) our author says,

“14Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. 16Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to

help us in our time of need.”

Both this text and our text today are an assertion that it is one who is truly and most assuredly human who sits at the right hand of God, not some demi-God, nor a super-hero, nor one who appears to be human but isn't. No! The one who is enthroned in heaven is the one who has taken on the complete totality of human life and experience, there is nothing about being human that is alien to him.

More so, our author alludes to the Gethsemane story as

paradigmatic for what it meant for Jesus to experience the fullness of life in the fact that he did not want to die. Like us, he desired not to take the path that awaits each human. Unlike us, the text does not say he feared death (which we do, as those bound over to the darkness of mistrust and anxiety about our relation to the eternal, cf, Heb 2:14-15). Rather, death would not have been his choice. But it was either death or holy war, there was no other way out. He could have called legions of

angels and brought about an eschatological climax to his ministry that would have played right into the hands of the evil one or he could take the path of non-resistance. For our sakes, he chose the latter out of obedience to his Father's will. For this reason, *his choice to forego violent retaliation*, his prayers for vindication were heard. His choice to not resist evil for evil was the Father's will. Jesus died not because God wanted Jesus to die, nor because God willed Jesus to die, nor

because Jesus wanted to die, but because we killed him, we wanted Jesus to die. He gave his life to us and for us.

Our author concludes by saying that Jesus' priesthood is thus different from the priesthood of the sacrificial system, the Aaronic priesthood. This priesthood was invested with life-taking, while Jesus' priesthood was about life-giving (or as our author puts it "he offered himself."). The writer of Hebrews avoids for the most part language related to the

sacrificial life taking of another (θυω θυσια and its cognates) and opts for the language of self-giving (φέρω αυαφερω, προσφερω, διαφερω). This linguistic shift is all important in this epistle for it underscores that while sacrificial language is used, it is used to subvert the sacrificial process. By comparing Jesus to Melchizedek (which is amplified in 7:1-10), our author intends us to understand that Jesus' relation to the mechanism of sacred violence, the sacrificial substitutionary



process is not to be understood in a direct typological manner, but now in a new way, inverted from the inside out.

## **Epistle Historical/Cultural Questions**

I refer readers to my essay “Sacrificial Language in Hebrews” in Violence Renounced edited by Willard Swartley (Pandora, 2000) for my Girardian interpretation of Hebrews, the linguistic shift and the role of the peacemaking priesthood of Jesus.

## **Epistle So What?**

Have you noticed that most church prayers and indeed the prayers of so many beloved Christians are expressions of wishes, dreams, hoping against hope? Have you noticed that when so many people pray they lack confidence that God hears them? Have you noticed that so many pray as though God had a hearing problem?

Our text today is our assurance that when we pray we are heard. We are also assured that as we make the kinds of choices Jesus

made, to renounce the desire for revenge, retaliation, retribution, vengeance or violence, we are heard and, like him, will be vindicated. Our times of sorrow, when we speak of God and are persecuted, hunted down, cast out and scapegoated, will come to an end, there will not only be resurrection but exaltation. We live in this hope, it is our life's blood and it is what enables us to forgive our enemies and love all with whom we come in contact. It is the source of our power when we pray for we know that

we are following in the steps of  
one who has already been there  
the trail blazer of our faith,  
Jesus Christ.

<http://seemslikegod.org/lectionary/2009/03/fifth-sunday-in-lent-march-29-2009/>

## **FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT** **- March 29, 2009**

**INTRODUCTION TO THE SCRIPTURE -  
March 29, 2009**

**JEREMIAH 31:31-34.** Jeremiah's ministry  
from about 627 to 580 BC covered one of the

most critical periods of Israel's history, just before the exile in Babylon. He warned of the catastrophe about to befall the nation because they had failed to live as God intended. His words were not entirely without hope. He looked forward to a "new covenant" - a relationship of the heart, not on stone tablets like the Law of Moses. People would do intuitively what God requires of them. No one would need instruction or an intermediary because everyone would "know the Lord."

**PSALM 51:1-12.** In the same spirit of repentance and renewal, this psalm pleads for forgiveness and voices the longing of a faithful soul for a new relationship with God.

**HEBREWS 5:5-10.** Hebrews is not a letter, but a theological essay written to encourage Jewish Christians enduring persecution, perhaps even rejection by their own families. It attempts to answer whether it was worth holding on to their faith in Christ. The writer assures the faithful that Jesus understands

what they are going through. He also suffered at the hands of his contemporaries. Through suffering in obedience to God, he opened the way to God for all. The image of Jesus as the high priest comes from the custom of the Jewish high priest offering a sacrifice on the Day of Atonement which renewed Israel's covenant with God.

**JOHN 12:20-33.** A group of Greeks came seeking Jesus. John has Jesus predict his own death and resurrection, and makes a deeper analysis of what this means. Through his sacrifice, like a seed planted to grow and bring forth much fruit, a new relationship with God would be established. His crucifixion would draw the whole world into this new relationship with God.

## **A MORE COMPLETE ANALYSIS.**

**JEREMIAH 31:31-34.** Jeremiah was a member of a priestly family from the village of Anathoth, a short distance north of Jerusalem. His prophetic ministry from about

627 to 580 BCE covered one of the most critical periods of Israel's history, just before the exile in Babylon. There are also five chapters of the book (40-44) which describe activities of the prophet after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. Two significant events marked the history of period: the break up of the great Assyrian empire and the rise of the Babylonian power; and the resurgence of religious nationalism in Judah during the reign of King Josiah, culminating in 621 BCE with the centralizing of worship in the temple in Jerusalem. After the death of Josiah in the battle of Megiddo (609 BCE), a succession of weak monarchs with anti-Babylonian policies brought about the surrender of Jerusalem in 597 BCE and the exile of the leaders of Judean society. A further anti-Babylonian revolt ended in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 587/586 BCE.

Jeremiah warned of the catastrophe about to befall the nation because they had failed to live as God intended. His words were not

entirely without hope. They look beyond the national disaster to a new spiritual revival. This theme can be found especially in chapters 30-32, frequently referred to as “the book of consolation.” The lectionary reading consists of a prose exposition of that hope amid a collection of poetic oracles, some of which reflect the oracles of both the earlier prophet Hosea (31:1-6) and the Jeremiah’s contemporary, Second Isaiah (31:10-14).

In this passage Jeremiah looked forward to a “new covenant” - a relationship of the heart, not on stone tablets like the Law of Moses. People would do intuitively what Yahweh requires of them. No one would need instruction or an intermediary because everyone would “know the Lord.” According to Jeremiah, the heart of the covenant forged in Sinai was an intimate, personal relationship with Yahweh, as close as that of husband and wife (vs. 32). For Jeremiah, the destruction of the temple symbolized the apostasy which ended the Sinai covenant. A new relationship



had become necessary, a covenant written “on their hearts.”

As with all ancient peoples, the heart was the seat of all psychic life, the centre of the emotions, the intellect, and especially, the will and moral life. Thus, for the Hebrews it became the point of contact with God. This “innermost spring of human personality is directly open to God and subject to his influence,” wrote R.C Dentan, professor of Old Testament at General Seminary, New York, in his article on the heart in *The Interpreter's Bible Dictionary*, (vol. 2, 550). But the heart is also prone to evil and isolation from God. Both Old and New Testaments present us with numerous passages of both response and rejection of spiritual realities by the human heart. The phrase “hardening of the heart” describes the drifting away from God so evident in the moral and spiritual decline of any age.

Jeremiah's hope for a covenant written on the

heart has an eschatological element in that he sees it as a future rather than an immediate event. It will also come about, not by human initiative, but by God's grace and with divine forgiveness for the apostasy and sin of the past.

**PSALM 51:1-12.** In the same spirit of repentance and renewal, this psalm pleads for forgiveness and voices the longing of a faithful soul for a new relationship with God.

The superscript of the psalm relates it to King David when Nathan condemned him for his adulterous assault on Bathsheba. At best, this is a poetic attribution made long after the story of the sin of Israel's greatest romantic hero had become common currency. It is now believed to be the product of a Levitical compiler or editor of the Psalter in the post-exilic period. One scholarly viewpoint regards

vs. 4 as evidence that it was not a Davidic composition because Bathsheba, Uriah and Joab were also sinned against by David's duplicitous actions.

The powerful message of this penitential psalm is by no means diminished by this exegesis. The psalmist pours out his guilt and shame in most memorable words. His sense of sin is much more profound than is found in many psalms of lament which express complaints against enemies and plead for deliverance from afflictions. Here is someone who has been animated by the teachings of the great prophets who denied the worth of animal sacrifices and emphasized a spiritual reaction to personal affliction. One of the most profound moral insights is the consciousness that sin is not only against one's fellow human beings, but against God. We have here a somewhat truncated attitude which does not recognize the injury to the former relationship, but focuses almost exclusively on the latter. He desperately wants to get right

with God, rather than restore whatever human relationships his sin may have broken.

Many people find vs. 5 a problem. Careful analysis, however, does not cast it as a condemnation of one's parentage. The penitent, not the mother, is shamed and disgraced by whatever actions lie behind this vivid expression of sin. A similar attitude is found in Ps. 58:3 and in the later Jewish concept of evil inclination in the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus 15:11-15.

On the other hand, the psalm contains a highly developed spiritual sense of what sin does to our relationship to God. The plea for a clean heart and a new and right spirit (vs. 10) has few equals in either testament. So also the prayer not to be cast out of God's presence or deprived of the spirit of holiness implores the continuation of the state of grace in which life must be steadfastly lived. Finally, the plea for restoration of a willing spirit (vs. 12) brings the moral implications of grace to the fore

almost as clearly as do the Gospels and the Pauline epistles.

**HEBREWS 5:5-10.** This is not really a letter in the usual sense, but more of a theological sermon or essay written to encourage Jewish Christians under some unstated threat, perhaps persecution, or rejection by their own families and community. It attempts to answer whether or not it was worth holding on to their faith in Christ.

Scholarly debate as to who wrote this essay and to whom it was written persists as vigorously today as a century or more ago. No one can be precise in answering those questions, only uncertain and speculative at best. The content of the document, however, defines the theological relation between the old covenant and the new, drawing upon the Greek version of the Hebrew scriptures rather than any particular historical setting. On the basis of who the author and the recipients believed Jesus to be, they can strengthen their

faith and make their witness in the face of whatever threat may endanger them.

The image of Jesus as the high priest in this passage comes from the custom of the Jewish high priest offering a sacrifice on the Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which renewed Israel's covenant with God. In the mind of the author, this is certainly the role which Jesus Christ fulfilled, not for Jews alone, but once and for all. The quotation in vs. 5 comes from Psalm 2:7 which the apostolic tradition regarded as a messianic reference. In vss. 6 and 10, the more obscure references to Melchizedek draw on Psalm 110:4 and a story in Genesis 14:17-20. In the latter percieope, Abram in his wanderings in Canaan and conflicts with neighboring kingdoms received the blessing of Melchizedek, the king and high priest of Salem (later Jerusalem). This referred to the apostolic tradition that Jesus, as the Messiah/Christ was both king of kings and God's high priest. In such a role, he could be Lord for both Gentiles and Jews.

The significant message of this reading, however, is in vss. 7-9. It emphasizes both Jesus' own human nature and his divine mission as the Son of God. It also summarizes the Passion narrative of the Gospels by recalling the story of Jesus' at prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane in particular, his suffering and death on the cross. The author assumed that his audience would make the connection immediately. He is also saying that this showed how he obediently submitted himself to the will of God, and so became the means of our salvation. Jesus is thus both the perfect priest and the perfect sacrifice. What is more, as Christ, the Son of God, he now reigns in glory.

The passage precedes a lengthy exhortation to give attention to this difficult doctrine (5:11-6:20) because it is the foundation for their life in the world in very trying circumstances. As such it provides a very appropriate complement to the gospel reading.

**JOHN 12:20-33.** A group of Greeks came seeking Jesus. John then recorded how Jesus predicted his own death and resurrection, and made a deeper analysis of what this meant: It is God's way of giving eternal life to all who believe. Through his sacrifice, like a seed planted to grow and bring forth much fruit, a new relationship with God would be established. His crucifixion would become God's way of drawing the whole world into this new relationship.

It would not have been unusual for Greeks (i.e. Gentiles) to seek out Jesus in Galilee, but this meeting occurred in Jerusalem "at the festival," one of the Jewish high holy days. We are not told why they asked to see Jesus, but many Gentiles were attracted to Judaism for its rigorous moral standards in an amoral civilization. As Paul later discovered, it was the covenant symbol of circumcision which made Gentiles hold back from a total commitment to the Jewish tradition. Writing in the 90s CE, many decades after Paul's



Gentile mission, John appears to use this pericope as a means of including them in the Christian community based on faith in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ/Messiah for all of humanity, not for Jews alone.

Throughout his gospel narrative, John has Jesus use the word “glorify” in reference not only to his death but also to his resurrection. Perhaps by the end of the 1st century early Christian art had already begun to portray the crucifixion in more attractive ways than it must have been experienced. Or perhaps knowledge of the resurrection had already caused the dark horror of that scene to have diminished before the brightness of faith in the risen Lord. The tradition of the seed that dies to give new life (vs. 24) obviously had been a strong apostolic tradition because Paul had also used it in his letter to the Corinthians, as had Jesus in his parable of the seed and sower. Here John tied it to Jesus’ teaching about service also found in the other

gospels.

More difficult to understand, however, are the subsequent words John attributed to Jesus. One commentary gives this pericope the title of “The Agony and the Voice.” (W.F. Howard. *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 8, 664). Howard also notes that this passage in John replaces the synoptic narrative of the agony in Gethsemane, but closely resembles Mark 14:33-35. The voice of reassurance (vs. 28) is similar to the voice in Mark 9:7 at the Transfiguration. Three different interpretations are given to the voice: by some of the disbelievers in the crowd who thought they had heard thunder. Others said it was an angel, possibly recalling two stories from Genesis 21:17 and 22:11 when God spoke to Hagar and Abraham in crucial situations.. The final word, however, came from Jesus. The hour of crisis had come when people must decide between walking in the light or the darkness (vss.35-36). For some reason the reading excludes this interpretation.

This whole passage focuses on the meaning and cost of discipleship. Without ever naming the crucifixion, it holds up the cross as the symbol of the sacrifice that discipleship entails. More than likely John wrote for a Gentile audience, so he used commonly recognizable metaphors such as a fruitful seed of wheat and contrasting light and darkness to explain in a positive manner, just what any Christian might expect in making such a commitment at the end of the 1st century. In common with the other gospels, he wove into this pericope elements of the apostolic tradition of the words Jesus himself had used. John also tied these to his theme of the mighty works of Jesus glorifying God. The effect is to lift the whole experience of discipleship from the ordinary mundane level of suffering and sacrifice to the sanctified holiness of accomplishing God's eternal purpose.

**<http://www.gaiarising.org/2009/03/who-needs-melchizedek-5th-sunday-in.html>**

**Who Needs Melchizedek? 5th  
Sunday in Lent, Year B**

**[Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-12; Psalm 119:9-16; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33](#)**

This is the final week in **[the Elves'](#)** review of Orthodox Christian belief leading to Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and the celebration of Easter. Jesus's last public dialogue in John's Gospel is confirmed, or explained, in the

portion plucked from the anonymous letter to the “Hebrews.” John’s Jesus says, “Whoever serves me must follow me, for wherever I am, my servant must be there also . . . if I’m elevated from the earth, I’ll take everyone with me.” Whoever wrote the letter to the “Hebrew” community in Rome says, “he [Jesus] became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him . . .” This leader’s interpretation of Jesus’s death and resurrection is that Jesus did not claim the power and the glory of high-priesthood. That was bestowed upon him by God himself – just like it was bestowed upon Melchizedek.

Both the Gospel of John and the Letter to the Hebrews are products of the leadership of communities in the late 1st to early 2nd Centuries who were struggling with the developing legend surrounding the death of Jesus. John’s community may have been more involved with the separation from Judaism of followers of the emerging Christian way.

Depending on the timing of the Gospel, John's community may also have been dealing with a double whammy: not only were they separating from traditional Judaism; traditional Judaism was also redefining itself without the stabilizing influence of the Temple in Jerusalem. The recipients of the letter to the Hebrews were more likely to have been dealing with persecution on the part of Romans of the emerging Christian religion.

The subject matter in the letter to the Hebrews might seem to be similar to the situation Jeremiah was writing about: Both were addressed to communities on the edge of exile, who were in danger of unraveling and giving up on God's rule (Jews in destroyed 6th Century b.c.e. Jerusalem), or the promise of Jesus's return (persecuted Christians in 1st Century Rome). The similarities end there. The writer of Hebrews was enamored with the legend of the mysterious high priest Melchizidek, who (so far as scholars have been

able to discover) had no parents, and never died. His only claim to legitimacy appears to be that he was not from the lineage of Aaron – who constructed the golden calf, thereby being the first to break God’s Covenant with Moses. Once more, anti-Semitism appears like a faint watermark behind the printed words.

It seems a mighty stretch of imagination to pick an obscure reference from [Genesis 14:18](#) [and Psalm 110:4](#) upon which to hang an argument about the divinity of Jesus as the Christ. But of such is orthodoxy often made. We will get to do it again in October for Proper 24.

The only scripture worth taking seriously in this group of readings is Jeremiah 31:31-34: “The New Covenant.” Of course the prophet Jeremiah, left behind in Jerusalem while most of the Jewish population was exiled to Babylon in the 6th Century b.c.e., was not talking about Jesus – who was born 600 or so years

later. He was talking about a new Covenant with God that would be honored by faithfulness to God's justice on the part of the people. The "new covenant" would not depend on Temple worship, but on individual response to God's law. "I will put my law within them," Jeremiah reports, "and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Jeremiah was not worried about orthodox rules for worship. Nor was he talking about some god-like priest-king who came from nowhere and lives forever as high priest to an amalgamation of the Canaanite deity El Elyon and Yahweh ("the order of Melchizedek"). Jeremiah was trying to assure that Judaism would survive. That could only happen if each individual person were to take on the responsibility to act in accordance with God's law. The Psalm Jeremiah would sing is Psalm 119: "I treasure the word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you. . . . I delight in the



way of your decrees as much as in all riches. . .  
. I will delight in your statutes; I will not  
forget your word.”

Jeremiah’s situation may have been similar to  
Third Millennium Christianity, which **John  
Shelby Spong** suggests will have to either  
change or die. Should exiles from Christian  
Orthodoxy reclaim the myth of a dying-rising  
god for a post-modern world? Or does  
sustainable life on 21st Century Planet Earth  
depend more on teasing out the story of  
Jesus’s life and teachings from two millennia  
of misquotation and misinterpretation?

From inside his own Jewish tradition, Jesus  
taught that the law of the Universe (God’s  
law) is distributive justice-compassion. God’s  
law (the rules of the universal order) shows no  
partiality. The rain falls on the just and the  
unjust. The sun shines, the winds blow, the  
earth turns. Because human consciousness  
can choose to live outside the realm of

distributive justice-compassion, Jesus also taught a radical abandonment of self-interest (“Love your enemies.”) Instead of unjust systems bringing war, famine, disease, and death (Empire), humans can choose non-violence, justice-compassion, and peace (Covenant). The downside, as Jews and Gentiles alike have learned through experience, is that choosing Covenant often gets people killed.

John’s Jesus says, “Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” Some Christians have interpreted this to mean not only salvation from hell in the next life, but indifference to injustice in this life. “I know I’m going to heaven because I believe in Jesus,” a co-worker once told me. “Why should I care what happens to anyone else?” I submit that this is the kind of Christian who long ago abandoned Jesus to his fate. As the writer of Matthew’s gospel suggests in his apocalyptic

description of **the final judgment**, the ones who will inherit the kingdom of God are the ones who feed the hungry, clothe the naked, extend hospitality to the stranger, visit prisoners – in short, those who abandon their own self-interest in the service of justice-compassion. These are the ones who accompany Jesus on his final walk to crucifixion and death. These are the ones in whom and with whom Jesus rises into incarnation.

**Luke's version** of the saying does not include allusions to “life in this world” versus “eternal life.” Luke’s Jesus says, “Whoever tries to hang on to life will forfeit it, but whoever forfeits life will preserve it.” When the Orthodox Christian interpretive gloss is removed, the conundrum that contains the truth is revealed. In the context of Jesus’s life and death, and prophetic Jewish tradition, in the service of distributive justice-compassion, whoever hangs onto life under the rules of

Empire will end up selling out to the systems of injustice. King Saul comes to mind. Even the great King David learned that lesson the hard way. So did Judas. But whoever gives up the safety of imperial control lives already in God's realm of distributive justice-compassion.

Jeremiah's task was to convince the people that what mattered to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was justice. Under Jeremiah's "new covenant," wherever they happened to be, and under whatever conditions, if the people lived in accordance with God's justice, God would restore them to the land, and with it, the Temple. For post-modern, 21st Century exiles from Christian orthodoxy, whenever anyone radically abandons self-interest in the service of distributive justice-compassion, the "new covenant" is established; a kenotic spirit rules; God's kingdom has come.

There is no need for a "high priest on the

order of Melchizedek."

[http://www.textweek.com/nuggets/nuggets\\_lent5b.htm](http://www.textweek.com/nuggets/nuggets_lent5b.htm)

## **LENT 5B**

March 29, 2009

Lindy Black

## **SCRIPTURES**

**Jeremiah 31:31-34**

**What it says** Jeremiah

prophesies a new covenant with

the law written on the hearts of the people so all know the Lord.

-The old and new covenants have much in common: both were initiated and concluded by Yahweh; both are centered on God; both are with the Israelites; in both, human response is in terms of the Law. So the newness is not in the essentials of the covenant but in the realm of its realization and of its means. It will not be broken (as the old one was often), for all will be faithful to it. This will be so because of a

fundamental change in the very being of humanity: humans will be created anew. Recalling that the Israelites saw the *heart* as the seat of intelligence and will power, we see that the *newness* is in God making them able to fulfill God's plans. Chris Haslam

- A *covenant*, in contrast to a contract, is a one-way agreement whereby the covenanter is the only party bound by the promise. Dictionary **(Israel broke many covenants with God**

**but God never did)**

-*Verse 31*: “new covenant”: This is the only time this phrase is used in the Old Testament. It is, however, used in the Qumran literature, but there it means *the Mosaic covenant*, with strong legalistic tendencies. Of course, this phrase was re-interpreted in the New Testament: see Luke 22:20 (The Institution of the Lord’s Supper); 1 Corinthians 11:25 Hebrews 8:8-12\_ Chris Haslam



-With the People of God under Moses' leadership, commandments were carved in stone. Under Abraham, the agreement with God was sealed with the sacrifice of animals cut in half-in fact the language of the Hebrew says that God "cuts a covenant." But no third party is the "cutting ground" for this new deal that God is proposing. Its terms are to be inscribed directly into the human heart.

- The "new testament" literally means new covenant and is fulfilled only in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20; Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6ff; Hebrews 8:8-9:28; 10:16ff; Romans 11:25-26). Jesus was saying to His disciples that the new covenant predicted by Jeremiah was now being instituted. It describes His work of salvation.

-Death precedes life, says Jesus. Not the other way around. Rev.

Debra Metzgar Shew

-Don't allow the pain of our past  
to define our future Thomas  
Tewell

-All ground IS ground zero. All  
ground is a place of death, where  
life is longing to be found. Rev.  
Debra Metzgar Shew

-The way to find one's life is to  
lose it, and the sure way to lose  
one's life is to grip it tighter than

one's convictions. Some form of this paradox is found frequently in the synoptic gospels. (See, for example Matthew 10:39, 16:25, 19:29; Mark 8:35, or Luke 9:23-24.)

- In contrast to "thou shalt not," and "thou shalt" are the words, "I will put," "I will write," "I will forgive."

-How tragic that we still go seeking legalistic laws and regulations by which to live the

Christian life. We have a higher standard. The law made nothing perfect. It still doesn't. It can't. Not even in the Christian's life. Only the Holy Spirit can do that by applying the living presence of Christ within us.

- "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the **heart** of stone and give you a **heart** of flesh. I will put my spirit within you..." (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

-A change of heart.: There's story about a new pastor who preached the same story the first, second and third Sunday he was there. Finally the Deacons came up to him and said, "Pastor, you've preached the exact same sermon three Sundays in a row. What's the deal?" "Well," the pastor answered, "You haven't yet done what I asked you to do the first time." Does little good to tell people they ought to change...only God touching their

hearts can cause that change.

- "I will be your God, and you shall be my people" Jeremiah 7:23

SERMON "WE CAN DO BETTER THAN THAT" We need laws so we can please God with our behavior. We can do better than that. Lindy

- I know how to be obedient but I do not know how to be in love.

BB Taylor

-Divine law: "If you love me, keep my commandments

-People would do intuitively what God requires of them. No one would need instruction or an intermediary because everyone would "know the Lord." John Sherman

-keeping up with the oughteries"  
good works law

-The law is not capable of giving us the happiness, the "life," the



"perfection" we seek from it.

-When love is the law, we police ourselves.

- Nothing we can do will make God love us more; nothing we fail to do will make God love us less.

-If I were fire, I would burn, If I were a woodcutter, I would strike; but I am a heart, and I love. BBTaylor

-Jesus did not take something out of us to make us good. He helped us see what was inside that was good

-May our love be as simple as

what you've made us to be. May  
our knowledge be as simple as the  
wisdom that comes from our  
hearts and

may our righteousness be as  
simple as doing justice, loving  
mercy and walking humbly with  
our God. Lindy

- I think therefore I am?  
Nonsense! I love, therefore I am.  
Coffin, (Cogito, ergo sum,  
Descartes. Amo, ergo sum,  
Coffin)

-Make sure your path is  
connected to your heart.

## Buddhist love

-We tend to substitute for love rather than deepen love.

-Love is triune or it dies. Fulton Sheen

-Love goes beyond behavior

## **Psalm 51:1-12**

**Hebrews 5:5-10** \_ Even though Jesus was the Son of God he learned obedience through suffering and is our high priest

and the source of salvation for all who obey him.

**John 12:20-33** Jesus' hour comes — he tells of his glorification using the image of a grain of wheat that dies and, in so doing, bears much fruit.

- “To lose” one’s life out of love is the way “to find” it for the sake of life eternal (or, to put it another way, for the sake of lasting values).

-An attitude of many congregations is that they want everything to get better, but nothing to change. This fulfills the quote, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and over again and expecting different results." In order for a seed to produce fruit, it has to change Stoffregen

-“Paradox” is a literary term that points to an “apparent contradiction”: lose–find, die–live, bestow–retain, give–get, etc

In Mark [8:35](#), Jesus foretells that “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it”. See also Matthew [10:39](#); Luke [9:24](#); [14:26](#).

-Could it be that the key to life is death? Could it be that the key to living is dying? Could it be that dying is important to living? Could that be the key to my life? Dying? Hmmmmmm. They don't

talk about this on the Pepsi commercials. Marquart

Those hearing the Gospel,  
( "Greek" ), didn't mean folks  
from Athens, but anyone foreign,  
"secular", different ... not-a-Jew.

- What does a salmon, a seed and  
you and I have in common? If  
you understand the answer to  
that riddle, you will see Jesus.  
Marquart

-The whole point of our Lenten season of repentance is that we have to be willing to let go of something in order to live into the power of God within. We have to be willing to relinquish our hold on "stuff" that we value but that stands between us and God *Rev. Sr. Thea Joy Browne*

-This parable is tantamount, basically, to the new commandment: "This is my commandment: love one another **as I** have loved you. There is no greater love than this: to lay



down one's life for one's friends.”  
(Jn 15:12-13)

## QUOTES

- "Heart religion" versus "head religion" Safiyah Fosua

- Salvation or slavation?

- Cheap Grace      grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, Bonhoeffer

- "movable sanctuary"  
heartsongchurch.

- "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right

spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10)

-Every dead leaf that clings in the winter is pushed off by new life.

-Resurrection: entrance into a new kind of existence

## **HUMOR**

-Have you lived here all your life? Not yet!

## **CHILDREN**

- Talk about ways we mark ourselves. We can be marked as a

biker, or a prisoner, or member of a fraternity, or of a family, clan, or gang. We can be marked with ear rings (any where!), tatoos, make up, wigs, etc. Our marks tell the world what we think is beautiful, or who is important in our lives. These marks are external. Jeremiah talks about being marked **INSIDE**, in our hearts. No one can see these inner marks except as we reflect them by our own behavior. Our behavior is considered a reflection of the nature of God because God put

those "marks" inside each of us.

## **ILLUSTRATIONS**

1. Sometimes a church structure must die before much fruit comes. A church building becomes the idol... and people struggles to keep the large empty structure heated in winter. Now I know why God wants to live in peoples hearts. They are moveable sanctuaries. Able to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. When the building

becomes more important than the message something is wrong.

2.Flossenberg Prison Camp where Bonhoeffer was executed weeks before the camp was liberated. A monument stands next to the only remaining, restored prison house in the park complex, a hundred yards or so from the crematorium. His name along with others arrested for conspiracy against Hitler are etched in stone with the words (in German) of 2 Timothy 1:7, "FOR GOD DID NOT GIVE US

A SPIRIT OF TIMIDITY, BUT A SPIRIT OF POWER, OF LOVE, AND OF SELF-DISCIPLINE."

3. In 1859 Charles Blondin, the French Acrobat, walked across a tightrope suspended across Niagara Falls. One day, thousands watched him as he pushed a bag of cement in a wheelbarrow along the wire, fifty metres above the raging waters. There was a great cheer when he reached the other side. Then Blondin challenged a nearby reporter: "Do you believe I can do

anything on a tightrope?” “Oh yes, Mr Blondin,” said the reporter: “After what I’ve seen today, I believe it. You can do anything.” However, the reporter melted into the crowd when he was invited to put his trust to the test and get into the wheelbarrow.

## **PRAYER PHRASES**

-O God, whose Son's death begot life, give us grace to let go of our lives, like a seed, and fall dead to

the ground that your life might  
be rooted in us. Amen. Debra  
Metzgar Shew

[http://www.piut.org/lent5B.  
htm](http://www.piut.org/lent5B.htm)

## **Fifth Sunday in Lent - Cycle B**

**Passion Sunday**

**Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 119:9-16;  
John 12:20-33; Hebrews 5:5-10**

**John 12:20-33:** One could almost call this  
Sunday's Gospel lesson, "The Last Temptation  
of Christ"!



The Pharisees, in John 12:19 say to each other, “You see, we can do nothing! The whole world has gone after him!” That statement of intense frustration by those who would stifle Jesus’ popularity would be literally fulfilled in the Gospel lesson for the lectionary for this Sunday – Passion Sunday.

This lesson begins with the words, “Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus’ (12:20-21)”.

The Greek word here translated “Greeks” is crucial to the understanding of the import of this story. It is the Greek word that should be best translated “Gentile”. It is *not* the Greek word for Jews who spoke Greek or lived in Gentile countries, nor does the word mean Greeks who were Jewish proselytes. It means “pagans”, “Gentiles” – those outside the influence of the Promised People, and

therefore in the eyes of the Judeans of that day, those rejected by God. These “Greeks” presumably have not come to Jerusalem to participate in the Passover festival, but specifically and intentionally to meet with “the Son of Man”. Thus, it is these “non-Jewish Gentiles” who come to Philip and ask to speak with Jesus.

It is intriguing to note that the two disciples to whom they go to gain entry to Jesus have Greek names – Philip and Andrew. Did these Greeks feel they would make more headway by going to apparently Greek-influenced disciples? We do not know. But the very placing of this story at this point in the Johannine narrative serves to illustrate clearly the truth of the Pharisees’ comment, “Look, the whole *world* has gone after him”, for now even non-Jewish Gentiles are seeking Jesus out!

The text does not tell us whether or not these Gentiles got to see Jesus! But what did

happen was a response by Jesus to their request, brought to him by Andrew and Philip – a response that seems thoroughly inappropriate! To their request that he visit with these Gentiles, Jesus responds:

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father with honor” (12:23b-26).

This is a strange response to a simple request by Gentiles to speak to Jesus! But if one puts this story in the larger context, then one can begin to perceive Jesus’ anxiety and his consequent reaction.

These Gentiles were coming to ask Jesus to leave the dangers of Jerusalem and the

coming inevitable final confrontation with the Jerusalem clergy aristocracy. Rather, they wanted Jesus to return with them into Gentile territory beyond Judean influence or authority. There, Jesus could be safe, and would be free and even welcomed to teach and heal as he so obviously felt led. It is intriguing that the synoptic gospels' report that Jesus spent significant time (some would estimate around one-third of his time) in Gentile territory beyond the borders of Galilee.

Thus, in these Gentiles' offer lay the way out of the death that would otherwise inevitably await Jesus if he continued his attack of the Judeans – and that, quite soon! Should he accept the offer? Would he accept the offer? Could he not now “save face” while rapidly de-escalating his conflict with the Jewish clerical aristocracy, doing so by accepting the request of a people who wanted him to teach and heal in their country and were open to having their society shaped into the kingdom of God? It

must have been terribly, terribly tempting – especially to a young man who really was dreading the thought of dying (cf. Luke 22:41-46). It was, in reality, the last temptation of Christ!

Jesus rejects their offer of escape. Using the metaphor of wheat, Jesus states that it is only through his dying that humanity will live. It is only through his crucifixion that those committed to him will be birthed into a new community. If he becomes fixated upon preserving his life, Jesus observes, then all will be lost – the kingdom, the world, humanity – and even his own soul. On the other hand, if he is willing to face into his own death, then all humanity will be redeemed. This is Jesus' answer to his last temptation. To take the easy way out would be to be disobedient to that heavenly vision and call that God had given to him, not just at the beginning of his ministry, but at the very beginning of time (John 1:1-14).

It is at this point that Jesus then utters one of the most poignant lines that appear in scripture. “Now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say – ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this very reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” (12:27).

This is one of the few places in John when you truly see into the inner anguish of the man himself. Here you see Jesus in the very raw! He is a young man – 33 years old. He doesn’t want to die! He wants to go on living, serving others, building a community, healing the broken, making humanity new again. Here is the opportunity to do so. With all his heart, he wants to cry out, “Father, save me from this hour”!

But he will not utter such a cry. Jesus will stay the course. He will play out the drama that lies before him. HE *MUST* DIE! For unless he dies, there is to be no redemption of humanity.

So Jesus makes the decision to stay in unyielding confrontation with the political, economic and religious powers of both Israel and of Rome until they do their worst and destroy him. To die is his purpose in life. So he calls upon God to sustain him in what he must now do.

The text tells us that God responds verbally to Jesus. Some can't perceive the words. But Jesus can. And Jesus now knows that God reassures him that God will see Jesus through what Jesus must do!

Jesus then turns to the crowd and says something utterly stunning. "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (as: 30-32).

Jesus' death, he is saying, will drive out "the ruler of this world". The conventional interpretation today of the phrase "ruler of the

world” is that this is a reference to Satan. However, that must be seriously questioned. First, the term “ruler of this world” as a reference to Satan is never used in the rabbinical literature contemporaneous with Jesus, nor would that term ever be used by first century rabbis for Satan – precisely because they believed with all their being that *Yahweh* was the ruler of the world! Second, it is not used in the Gospel of John as a reference for Satan; indeed, the only other places it occurs (John 3:1, 7:26, 48; 14:30), it is clearly a reference to someone other than Satan. Third, for this to be a reference to Satan would alter the whole meaning and thrust of John 11:1—12:50, which pits the struggle as not between God and Satan, but between Jesus and the Judeans.

So who is the “ruler of this world”? It is the Jewish religious aristocracy – the consistent usage of the word “ruler” throughout the Gospel of John (3:1; 7:26, 48; 14:30). It is the Sanhedrin – the Jewish “congress” of priests,



Pharisees and Sadducees -- who have done everything possible to “drive out” Jesus and his community of faith. So they will be judged by the Lord of history, and will therefore discover that it is, instead, they who will be “driven out”. Jesus, on the other hand, will be “lifted up from the earth” (i.e., will be crucified), and thus, by dying on behalf of the world, “will draw all people to myself”!

Consequently, it comes down to an eternal choice, Jesus says. The choice is not simply between whether Jesus will take the “easy way out” or to act out his obedience to a God who calls him to a cross. The choice is ours, as well. Jesus says, “If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light” (12:35b-36).

Each person can choose darkness or light, the ruler of this world or Jesus. The choice is before you – to continue to be a part of the present division of power which will oppress,

exploit and seek to control you (but, because you are use to it, seems most secure and stable) or to become a part of the “beloved community” of the Crucified One who is in society to return it to God’s intentions for society? The choice is now before Israel, just as it was placed before them by Moses in the book of the Hebrew Bible which best presented that vision of God’s intentions for human society: “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. . . . Choose life, so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him” (Deut. 30:15, 19b-20a).

And the choice is before each of us this Passion Sunday, as well. Do we follow the “ruler of this world”? Do we embrace their political, economic and ethical values of lust for control, oppression, greed and exploitation, of domination and of control? Do we embrace the temptation to “take the easy way out” in order to live in security, stability and apparent

peace, in order to do the teaching and healing we so love to do? Or do we choose to join with the Christ and his beloved community to obediently work for God's intentions for humanity, even if that means receiving the wrath of those "rulers of the world"? You see, it is our Passion Sunday, as well!

**Jeremiah 31:31-34** is the prophet's magnificent prophecy, "The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It 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. But 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. No 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”.

This passage of scripture is often interpreted by Christians to be a prediction by Jeremiah of God's intentions to replace God's covenant with Israel with a covenant with a people who would take Israel's place – the Christian church. The author of the Gospel of John argues that Jesus had come to create God's society through the beloved community, made necessary by the obvious failure of the “Judeans” to do so. But it is difficult to argue that this was what Jeremiah had in mind when he wrote this famous prophecy.

When one reads this passage in its full context, it is obvious that what Jeremiah intends to communicate is that God will act to bring about a renewed relationship between Israel and God's Self. God will do so by creating a new covenant with Israel that will be different than the one made on Mount

Sinai (Exod. 19—Numbers 11). That will occur, not because the original covenant was inadequate or wrong, but because Israel had refused to obey it. And they had refused to obey it because their natural (i.e., sinful) inclination was to lust for power rather than for justice, to build their own fortunes rather than to equitably share their wealth, and to seek their own good rather than to yearn after relationship with God. Therefore, what God is about to do, Jeremiah proclaimed, is that he will begin a profound work in the hearts of the people of Israel so that, more than anything else, they would want to “know the Lord” and thus live in a way most conducive to fostering that relationship (that is, with political justice and an equitable distribution of wealth, so that humanity’s need to dominate and to hoard would be eliminated). It is Israel’s sins that caused the nation to collapse. But it will be God’s forgiveness that will restore them back to the shalom of God and of each other.

The true importance of this passage, however,

is not simply in its prophecy of a coming new covenant, but of Jeremiah's perception that God's work is always in the "not-yet". Walter Brueggemann makes an excellent distinction between the division of the world into "kings" and "prophets", "technicians" and "poets".[\[1\]](#) Kings and technicians are concerned with what is, with the management and control of the resources of life and even of life itself. Prophets and poets, on the other hand, center their lives in the conviction that "something enormous is about to break in on us" and thus create "images for hope".[\[2\]](#) Brueggemann then writes, "Shalom affirms that in a world of kings, prophets must be heard and taken seriously; that in a world of technicians, the voice of the poet is essential for the humanness of our world".[\[3\]](#)

"The voice of the poet is essential for the humanness of our world." The lead singer of the rock group, U2, and now the international star who helps lead the United Nation's effort

to eliminate extreme poverty throughout the world, Bono, spoke publicly to President Bush, to the gathered members of Congress and to government, religious and business leaders at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC on February 3, 2006. This poet and prophet, speaking to kings and technicians, commended the United States for its charitable work around the world. But he then added:

“Finally, it’s not about charity after all. It’s about justice. And that’s too bad – because Americans are good at charity. We like to give, and we give a lot, even those who can’t afford it.

“But justice is a higher standard. Africa makes a fool of our idea of justice; it makes a farce of our idea of equality. It mocks our pieties, it doubts our concern, it questions our commitment.

“Sixty-five thousand Africans are still dying every day of a preventable, treatable disease,

for lack of drugs we can buy at any drug store. Preventing the poorest of the poor from selling their products while we sing the virtues of the free market – that’s a justice issue. Holding children to ransom for the debts of their grandparents – that’s a justice issue. Withholding life-saving medicines out of deference to the Office of Patents – that’s a justice issue.”[\[4\]](#)

It is crucial that prophets speak truth to presidents, that poets speak truth to technicians. For they just may listen – and end up changing the world.

The essence of the conflict between Jesus and the political, economic and religious systems of Israel and of Rome was that they did not listen! The leaders of Judea had organized the Jewish world precisely as they wanted it organized – in a way that benefited them and maintained them in power. And Jesus came announcing the “kingdom of God” in which God would turn the values and the



assumptions of the world upside down. And that was most unwelcome news to them. They were not open to any new covenant!

“A number of years ago, I met a wise man who changed my life”, Bono concluded his talk. “In countless ways, large and small, I was always seeking the Lord’s blessing on my work and my life.

And this wise man said, “Stop”. He said, “Stop asking God to bless what you’re doing. Get involved in what God is doing – because it’s already blessed!”

Well, God is with the poor. That, I believe, is what God is doing. And that is what he’s calling you and me to do!”[\[5\]](#)

**Psalm 119:9-16** contains the well-known lines, “How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments. I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin

against you” (vss. 9-11).

Psalm 119 is both the longest psalm in the Hebrew Psalter and a psalm that honors and celebrates the Law of Moses. The author of the Psalm obviously wants to make God’s Law the governing and shaping influence upon his life. The psalm is an acrostic with each of its sections beginning with a Hebrew letter. Thus, it is divided into 22 stanzas (the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet), with each stanza being eight verses. The stanza that makes up today’s Psalter lesson begins with the letter *bet* (or “B”).

The key to the understanding of this stanza is verse 11: “I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you”. The Hebrew word translated “treasure” actually means “hide” or “store up”. Literally, in translation from the Hebrew, it reads “The commandments from his lips – I have certainly not veered from them; in my bosom I have treasured the words from his mouth”.

In other words, the author is saying that, if we are to live a truly fulfilled and rich life, we ought to immerse ourselves in the study and devotion of scripture (the Law). We are to commit it to memory, to submerge our psyche in it, to make it our necessary food and drink. We are to treasure it (vs. 11), to learn from it (vs. 12), to teach it (vs. 13), to delight in it (vs. 14), to meditate upon it (vs. 15), and to never allow ourselves to forget it (vs. 16). If we so inundate and submerge ourselves in the scriptures, so that it becomes bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, then we will keep our way pure, we will center our heart upon Yahweh and we will not stray from living and acting out our lives in God and in the realization of God's kingdom – the shalom community! This is the sure foundation upon which every young man or woman should build their lives – and old folk, as well!

**Hebrews 5:5-10** is the closely reasoned argument by this unknown Christian author that examines what it was about Jesus' death

that made it redemptive. He begins by presenting an argument from the Hebrew Bible that supports his contention that Jesus was appointed by God to be the world's high priest. The author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 2:7 ("You are my Son, today I have begotten you") and 110:4 ("You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek"). The introduction of the figure of Melchizedek is crucial to the author's argument.

Melchizedek is mentioned only in Genesis 14:18-20 and Psalm 110 in the Hebrew Bible, and only in Hebrews (5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1, 10-11, 15, 17) in the New Testament. He was the king of Salem (the predecessor city to Jerusalem) in Genesis as well as a "priest of God Most High" (Gen. 14:18b). His importance is emphasized by the fact that Abram (later, changed to Abraham) submits himself to the authority of Melchizedek and does obeisance – something Abram's status requires of no other monarch he meets!

Why is Melchizedek so honored? Psalm 110 presents the argument that Melchizedek is both the ideal king who is superior even to David, and the ideal priest who mediates directly between God's people and God (I Kings 8; Ps. 132:9-10). That priesthood is eternal (Ps. 110:4a), and therefore transcends both the Aaronic and Levitical priesthoods. Being both the king of justice and of shalom and as an eternal priest, Melchizedek is the best "type" of the Son of God – whose royal, holy, high priesthood transcends all other political, economic and religious orders!

That is precisely the argument the author of Hebrews builds in this passage. Jesus, that author argues, is God's eternal high priest as typified in Melchizedek. Jesus is the divine king greater than David, God's son who, by being God's son, is qualified both to be the high priest who makes the sacrifice for sin and at the same time the sacrifice itself that will atone for the sins of Israel and of the world.

But how does Jesus make atonement for the world's sins? He does so, Hebrews states, through his suffering. He prayed fervently for deliverance from death (cf. John 20:27) because, as an authentic human being, he no more sought death than any of us world. He "offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears" (5:7). His prayer was answered by God, not by his avoiding of death but through his resurrection from the dead!

The author of Hebrews then moves on to an intriguing wordplay with which he identifies the redemptive element in Christ's sacrificial death. He writes, "Although he was a Son, Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered" (5:8). The Greek word translated "learned" is *emathen* and the word "suffered" is *epathen*. Jesus' *learned* obedience (his natural inclination as a human was to survive; he had to *learn* to obey God's call to him against all logic and survival instincts) cancelled the disobedience of Adam (who represents the entire human race, Rom. 5:19)

and thus qualifies Jesus to act as God's eternal high priest (Heb. 2:17; 4:15). It was his obedience (cf. John 12) that actually brought about the atonement of humanity because, through that learned obedience, he fulfilled God's redemptive plan for humanity. Thus, "he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (5:9) by being in his actions and obedience, "a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek" (vs. 10). That was the significance of what Jesus did when he decided to "stay the course" in John 12:20-33.

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(Cycle B Lent 5.doc)

<http://home.clear.net.nz/pages/bfletch/b124.html>

## **THE HOUR OF JESUS**

The 'hour' is a biblical term which is repeatedly mentioned in John's gospel. John's gospel is a long and profound meditation on 'the hour' written as a drama in which everything is oriented to the final outcome - the encounter of the power of Jesus, based on love with the unjust power rejecting Him. The drama ends on the cross and finally in the victory over the cross and death - the resurrection.

### **the first reading:**

The prophet Jeremiah looked toward a new community reconciled to God. The new community will "know God" and will lead lives



completely attuned to God's intentions as voiced in the Torah.

They are fully and completely forgiven - a community no longer immobilised by the residue of their past failure to obey!

## **JEREMIAH 31 : 31 - 34**









































































The Hebrew scriptures do not reflect much upon any 'perfect' or 'finished' community. But Jeremiah, who could speak so poignantly about the judgement and end of old Israel (Jr.4:19-26 & 7:27-34), anticipates a people fully turned to YHWH in a glad, joyous communion; "Now I shall watch over them to build and to plant,YHWH declares" (Jr.31:32b NJB).

Jeremiah speaks about YHWH's new age. This is not talk about any institutional community structure, bureaucracy, hierarchy or ideology. The reference is to a community as a slice of humanity that is committed to and participates in God's resolve for a new world.

The newness does not depend upon old Israel - but it includes it (J.31:31-32). And the new covenant community will be characterised by a full inner obedience to the Torah (Jr.31:33) and a new attitude of utter forgiveness towards each other within the community, made possible by YHWH's first

having mercy on them (Jr.31:34).

The text affirms and anticipates that God has in mind and in heart, a new economy of heaven and Earth. The new heaven and Earth will be quite unlike the present! It is a future economy that is neither mortgaged to the present, nor derived from the present.

That is an intellectual scandal for modernists who believe that there will be no new pieces of reality given, and believe that there will be no new pieces of reality given, and that all that remains is to manage well what is and what will be and that all that is left to do is to secure as much of reality for oneself as one can!

Jeremiah anticipates about a Torah-shaped community which replaces the old social reality, but his speech it isn't the final word! It is YHWH's freedom that is at work in Hebrew society. A new people is promised and a new political reality is given - the old disobedient past mentioned in last Sunday's first reading (2 Ch.36:14-23) is over-ridden. YHWH has

moved on!

The Hebrew people in their imagination are now authorised to move on as well - waiting, listening, hoping, and anticipating the newness that will bring all creation under YHWH's rule; the land, animals and this people (Jr.31:32)! All will form a chorus of praise to God!



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## **the response:**

In the renewed covenant the hearts of believers will be transformed so that their sins will be forgiven and they will walk the way of God.

## **PSALM 51 : 1 - 4, 12 - 15**

The speakers demand from the holy One what they cannot do for themselves; restore

their personhood - with a 'clean heart' (v.10a). It means the ability to make a new beginning and having the capacity for new living!

The plea for 'a new spirit' (v.10b) also asks for the chance to begin again. The 'wind' to govern is gladly given by YHWH (Is.11:2) but it is never possessed as of right! It is always held in trust.

The speakers place themselves at the complete disposal of YHWH and ask for a re-issue of gifts that make the good life possible. The act of deep repentance assumes a stance in which the gift of power for governing, might be given again. The original psalmist might have had in mind the experience of David. David lost YHWH's authorising power-to-rule when he acted unthinkably against Uriah and Bathsheba. Yet a deeply disoriented life can begin again!

David was guilty of pride against YHWH. He imagined he was autonomous; that he could live his life without reference to YHWH and YHWH's commandments. Where there is

serious disorder in our lives responsibility must be taken for it. But there is the possibility of new life too! This new reality cannot be forced from YHWH's side. We can only receive it as a free gift.



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## **the second reading:**

The letter to the Hebrews is written to Christians who wanted to interpret Christianity as a sect within Hebrew religion. The writer, using the mysterious figure of Melchizedek, argues for a priesthood that is qualitatively superior to the Aaronic priesthood of Hebrew worship.

## **HEBREWS 5 : 7 - 9**

Earlier in the passage the writer describes the characteristics of the Aaronic high priest

(vv.1-4). The cultic priest offered sacrifices for sins, empathised with the weaknesses of the people and exhibited humility in light of being appointed by God.

Then the writer applies the same characteristics of cultic priesthood to Christ becomes, "the source of eternal salvation" (v.9 NJB). The priesthood of Christ, the writer argues, is realised in the once-for-all sacrifice that Jesus offered for sin and the cultic practices of the Aaronic priesthood are merely shadows of this offering!

The old cultic practices are no longer valid for Christ is designated by God (vv.5-6,10). The writer links the title 'Son' with high-priest (Ps.2:7 & Ps.110:4). Combining Hebrew apocalyptic 'Son of man' images with the language of Platonic mysticism, the writer interprets Jesus as the high priest established by God. 'Son' is a title that entails ideas of obedience and intimacy. There are about Christ's priesthood these qualities that clearly make it superior to the line of the mysterious



Melchizedek.

By 'obedience' to the Word (the Torah of YHWH), Jesus identifies with human weakness (v.8). The divine high-priest is not immune to suffering but learns from it - suffering is his tutor. Suffering is a necessary ingredient in faithfulness to God. The reader is encouraged. Jesus our high priest is our companion who empathises with our pain and prevents our sufferings from leading to despair.

Christ has been 'perfected' through suffering (v.9a)! By facing mortality and learning obedience in what he suffered - Christ is validated by God and becomes what the Aaronic priesthood could never be; - the source of ultimate life for all (v.9b)! In the final chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews the writer exhorts readers to take on the priestly mantle themselves. They are invited, "to suffer outside the gate" as Jesus did, and continually "to offer unending sacrifices of praise to God" (Hb.13:12-15 NJB)!



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## **the Gospel:**

Greek-speakers, who had come to Jerusalem for Passover, ask to see Jesus. Jesus' response to their request is expressed in terms of God's new covenant - a covenant that includes everyone.

### **JOHN 12 : 20 - 33**

Facing His own imminent death, Jesus thinks in terms of God's covenant plan for the salvation of all humanity (v.24), when replying to the request of some Greek-speaking Hebrew worshippers who were in Jerusalem for the Passover (vv.20-22).

One view of death is to understand it as a putting an end to further achievement. When dead a person can't do anything more! Or

another view of death is that it can be an achievement in itself. For example, a heroic death can redeem a worthless life!! Or a person's death can focus the achievement of a life-time. St.Paul says the death of Jesus was for others (Rm.4:25). That underlines the self-giving of Jesus was dominant in His life!

In the Hebrew scriptures, God's 'glory' (v.28) is any triumph of God over oppression. When the Hebrew people crossed the Reed Sea freeing themselves from Egypt, the scriptures say they saw God's 'glory' in the demise of the Egyptians (Ex.14:31 & 15:21). That 'glory of God' is YHWH's appearance in history. The God of the Hebrew scriptures is essentially liberating! Now the gospel writer says that this liberation comes through Jesus' hour of arrest, beating, ridicule, crucifixion, death and burial (v.23)!

Jesus was 'glorified' in His suffering and death! Living and loving are similar actions. To live truly, is to give our life to others! To try to save our life selfishly - is not living! It is

death 'without glory' as the gospel writer would say!

Jesus 'worked' for the Father's 'glory' (v.26b). His death is freely offered and is the completion of that work according to the writer (vv.27-28) in that Jesus' 'glorification' reveals the greatness of the Father's love for people.

Jesus is the vehicle of God's judgement (vv.29-33). Whenever the prophets announced a liberation of the people (and the punishment of the oppressors) they described God as "coming among the clouds" to make a judgement (J.,2:2 & Zp.1:15).

Jesus is saying that He is the messiah and that He is establishing justice on Earth. The allusion is to the book of Daniel (Dn.7:24) where a mysterious person, "like a human one", is described. This mysterious one comes, "among the clouds of heaven" to rule over all the Earth!

[http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons\\_that\\_work\\_106304\\_ENG\\_HTML.htm](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons_that_work_106304_ENG_HTML.htm)

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## **March 29, 2009 – Fifth Sunday in Lent**

**Year B**

By the Rev. Dr. J. Barry Vaughn

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-13 or Psalm 119:9-16; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33



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Phillips Brooks, author of “O little town of Bethlehem,” and briefly Bishop of Massachusetts, was also responsible for one of the masterpieces of American nineteenth-century church architecture: Trinity Church in Boston’s Copley Square. Brooks played a very direct role in Trinity’s design. However, there is one feature of Brooks’ design that is visible only to those who preach in Trinity church. Brooks had these words carved on the inside of Trinity’s pulpit: “Sir, we would see Jesus.”

They are, of course, the words that “some Greeks” spoke to Philip when both they and

Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem. The Greeks were more than likely non-Jews who were fascinated by Judaism's antiquity and its profound ethical teaching. They were known as "God-fearers," and they were numerous in the first century. Many of these "God-fearers" would have converted to Judaism had it not been for the requirement of circumcision. Along with Jesus and his disciples, the "God-fearers" were on their way to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. But Jesus was also on his way to suffer, die on the cross, and be raised again.

When Philip reported to Jesus that the Greeks had asked to see him, Jesus exclaimed, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." This is a major turning point in John's gospel. Scholars tell us that John is divided into the "book of signs" and the "book of glory." In the "book of signs" (the first part of John) Jesus performs seven miracles that John refers to as signs. They begin when Jesus turns water into wine at the wedding

feast at Cana and culminate with Jesus' greatest miracle: raising Lazarus from the dead. Throughout the "book of signs" Jesus makes enigmatic references to his "hour" or "time" and says that it has not yet come. When his mother tells him that the revelers at the wedding feast have run out of wine, he says, "My hour has not yet come." In John 7:8, Jesus tells his disciples that he will not go to Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths because his "time has not yet fully come."

But when the Greeks asked to see Jesus, he knew that the hour had come for him to be glorified. As Jesus amplifies his enigmatic comment about the hour of his glorification having come, we realize that Jesus' idea of glory and our idea of glory are radically different. For Jesus, to be glorified was to embrace the cross, the epitome of suffering:

"Unless a grain of wheat falls  
into the earth and dies, it  
remains just a single grain; but if



it dies, it bears much fruit. ...  
Now my soul is troubled. And  
what should I say – ‘Father, save  
me from this hour’? No, it is for  
this reason that I have come to  
this hour. ... And I, when I am  
lifted up from the earth, will  
draw all people to myself.”

Because non-Jews such as the Greeks were seeking to meet Jesus, he knew that his mission was no longer restricted to Israel but had become universal. It was time for him to be lifted up – that is, crucified – so that all people could be drawn to him.

For us glory is about having more: more money, more prestige, more power. For Jesus, glory was about giving more, and he demonstrates this throughout John’s gospel, but nowhere more vividly than in the final chapters. Jesus gives himself to his friends by washing their feet. Then he gives himself to

the world by dying on the cross.

It is the completion of the great arc of self-emptying that began with the opening verses of John. The cosmic Word by which God spoke creation into being descends from on high and is clothed with flesh, “and we beheld his glory.” The Word Incarnate heals the sick, feeds the multitude, raises the dead, and finally completes his task by dying on the cross, and only then resumes the glory that is rightfully his.

“Sir, we would see Jesus.” Phillips Brooks knew that everyone who steps into a pulpit and presumes to preach the gospel needs to think about those words, because the great temptation of preaching is to give our hearers something other than Jesus. “We would see Jesus,” our listeners plead, and we give them our learning, comments on the day’s news, a witty joke or two, but too often there is little of Jesus in our preaching.

But it is not only preachers who do this. All around us are people who want to see Jesus. Do they see him in us? Do they see the Servant-Lord who washed the feet of his friends? Do they see the prophet who cleansed the Temple? Do they see the healer who made the blind to see? If we are to let people see Jesus in us, then we must go ourselves and sit at his feet, let him heal us, feed upon his body broken for us, and above all stand at the cross and wonder as the Word that spoke out of the void lapses into silence and death.

A few years ago, a rabbi at a large Reform synagogue published an editorial in the local newspaper on Christmas Day. He said, "I like Christmas, and I like Christians. My only problem with both is that they need more Jesus."

Precisely. Sometimes those who are outside the circle of the church can see and name our problems far better than we can. We all need a lot more Jesus. It's not only a problem for preachers; it's a problem for every one of us who are called by the name of Christian.

"Sir, we would see Jesus," the Greeks said to Philip. We, too, need to see Jesus, so that when others want to see Jesus, they can see him in us. As the old spiritual puts it:

*In the morning when I rise,  
Give me Jesus.  
When I am alone,  
Give me Jesus.  
When I come to die,*

*Give me Jesus.  
You can have all the world,  
But give me Jesus.*



-- The Rev. J. Barry Vaughn, Ph.D., has led congregations in Alabama, California, and Pennsylvania. He has preached at Harvard, Oxford, and the Chautauqua Institution, and more than fifty of his sermons have been published. He is a member of the history faculty at the University of Alabama and is rector of St. Alban's Episcopal Church in Birmingham, AL.

**<http://lectionary.wolsblog.com/2009/03/24/sermon-lent-5b/>**

Revd Kristin Ofstad, Minister, Thurso United Reformed Church

## Telling the time correctly

Timing matters. We know it, and Ecclesiastes 3 expresses it very eloquently for us:

‘For everything there is a season  
and a time for every matter  
under heaven: a time to be born  
and a time to die; a time to plant,  
and a time to pluck up what is  
planted; a time to kill, and a time  
to heal; a time to break down,  
and a time to build up .....’.

Timing is crucial for the Jesus we meet in John’s gospel. When his mother persuades him to solve the wine problem at Cana, he does so reluctantly because ‘my hour has not yet come’ (2:4). As his reputation grows, he manages to dodge those who try to arrest him ‘because his hour had not yet come’ (7:30 and 8:20). He speaks of ‘the hour that is coming’ several times (4:21,23; 5:25,28; 16:25,32).

Therefore, when in today's text he finally says that 'the hour has come', we should realise that we have reached the absolutely pivotal point in the whole story. The writer of the story has also ensured that it is Jesus himself who is in control of his own fate. He states it clearly in 10:15-18:

I lay down my life for the sheep.  
I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.

In today's text we hear Jesus say, 'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say - Father, save me from this hour? No, it is for this reason I have come to this hour'.

The Jesus we encounter today shows great focus and a profound grasp of timing. His moment has come, because the Greeks have asked to see him. His salvation is for everyone, everywhere, and he has waited and waited for the 'other sheep' to turn up and acknowledge that he is for them, too. The dodging game, the hiding can stop. He can step out onto the world stage and lay down his life in order to save the world. He is about to step into the glory of fulfilling the purpose of his life - to do his Father's will unequivocally, without hesitation. The little parable about the seed having to die before the fruit can happen is like a key that unlocks the mystery.

What do I mean by that? I am saying that we should understand that the purpose of creation is to teach us about the God of



redemption, and also to teach us about the purpose of our existence. Everything in creation is an illustration, a visual parable, of death and resurrection. Life cannot happen without the dying and rising. And so it is with us. New life, rebirth, transformation cannot happen in our lives without our letting go of that which holds us back. In creation new life cannot happen if the seed is not planted. Jesus is not only the once-and-only Word made flesh. He is also the one who shows us the purpose of our lives, namely to live in the knowledge that we exist in order 'to make the reality of God present'. For this we need to be focussed and alert at all times in order to fulfil the meaning and purpose of our lives, i.e. to grasp those moments when we can say, along with Jesus, 'the hour has come'.

We tend to speak of our journeying in individual terms, but it is essential that we talk of the local church and its calling to be a living interpretation of the good news of God's love. Even more than individuals, local

congregations are constantly being called to set out for God's country and to give God's Word flesh - to make the reality of God present in *their* neighbourhood, *their* town, *their* time in history. That is what the church exists for; it has no other meaning or purpose than making the reality of God present here and now.

When do we ever hear from a local church these words: 'The hour has come for us to fulfil that for which we were called. *Now* is the moment we have been waiting for, when God requires of us something extraordinary, now is the moment when we must find the courage to die from the past and become a new creation!'

When this does happen, a local church can be and do amazing things which blaze with the glory of God present. Neighbourhoods transformed. Communities built. Debts rescinded. Children given opportunity. The hungry fed. Beauty rediscovered. Even more astonishing things happen when local

churches from different traditions get together to do God's new thing for their neighbourhood or their town.

We must constantly be on the alert and prepared for our moment, so that we do not miss it. Jesus immediately knew that his hour had come when the Greeks asked to see him. So should it be with us, the church on the street corner, in the deprived neighbourhood, in the town centre or in the rural village. Always, there is the possibility that God can and will do wonderful, glorious, life-giving work in and through his people. In the words of our epistle text today:

For we are what he has made us, created in Christ for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. (Ephesians 2:10)

Diogenes Allen, in an incisive essay on the missional challenge of late postmodern western culture, suggested that Christopher Fry had captured our situation well in his play

*A Sleep of Prisoners.* Allen introduced the quotation with these comments:

We remain captives within a mental framework that has actually been broken. We are like prisoners who could walk out of a prison because all that would enclose us has been burst open, but we remain inside because we are asleep. Christopher Fry, however, tells us that this is the time to wake up.

“The human heart can go to the  
lengths of God.

Dark and cold we may be, but this  
Is no winter now. The frozen misery  
Of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to  
move;

The thunder is the thunder of the  
floes,

The thaw, the flood, the upstart  
Spring.

Thank God our time is now when  
wrong

Comes up to face us everywhere,

Never to leave us till we take  
The longest stride of soul men ever  
took.

Affairs are now soul size.  
The enterprise  
Is exploration into God.”

**[http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article\\_id=2878](http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=2878)**

## **The Hour Has Come**

MARCH 31, 2003

Fifth Sunday of Lent (B), April 6, 2003

“I will draw everyone to myself” (Jn 12:32)

The season of Lent is drawing to its conclusion. The hour has come. We may think that the hour referred to in John’s Gospel is the hour of Jesus’ death. It is, but the author

gives that dreaded hour a most unexpected meaning. He claims that the hour of Jesus' death is really the hour of his glorification. He further insists that Jesus is glorified, not as a martyr, but as the source of new life for us. We hear this so often that we might fail to realize the paradox here: Jesus' death brings us new life. What does this mean? The readings for today provide us with an answer.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God announces a new covenant. This does not mean that the other covenants have been abrogated. We are still creatures of the earth (Gn 9), who cling to God's promises (Gn 22), who are subject to God's law (Ex 20), and who are embraced by God's mercy (Jer 31). This new covenant will be something quite different, something extraordinary. Written on our hearts, it will effect an interior transformation.

The evils of today, those we witness and those of which we are a part, require much more

than simple external change. If we are honest, we will admit that we need radical interior transformation. Our self-absorption and unbridled pursuit of personal satisfaction, our arrogant sense of superiority, the hatred and desire for revenge that eat at our hearts can be remedied only at their roots. We are certainly in need of a new covenant commitment.

The technical covenant formula, “I will be their God and they will be my people,” is comparable to the marriage formula, “I do take you as my spouse.” This language bespeaks loving intimacy. These words should make us step back in total amazement, for they imply that in the face of human infidelity, God establishes a covenant of the heart. Perhaps the failure of so many human commitments between couples, within families, at the workplace and even among nations clouds our eyes to the reality of God’s unbounded love. This is a remarkable covenant. When will it be established? “The

days are coming, says the Lord.”

The sentiments of Psalm 51 might well be our response to God’s astounding offer of loving commitment: “Have mercy on me...wipe out my offense...create a clean heart in me.” Today we might say: Help me to accept what I find bothersome in others; heal me of my stubbornness, my selfishness and my pride; cleanse me of hatred for people of cultures that are foreign to me and of nations that might pose a threat.

God announces that the days are coming when all of this will happen. Deep down in our hearts, can we believe this? Are we doing anything to bring it about? But even in the face of doubt, God declares: The days are coming.



JESUIT  
VOLUNTEER  
CORPS





JESUIT  
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CORPS

As we turn to the Gospel, we hear Jesus say, “The hour has come.” True, it is the hour of his death, but it is also the hour of his glorification. While this glorification may refer in part to the unique relationship that he enjoys with God (“a voice came from heaven”), the reading suggests that it also has something to do with the new life that will spring from his death. Jesus’ obedience to his destiny, mentioned in both the Gospel and the reading from Hebrews, opens the doors of life for us. In this he is glorified.

To whom will this new life be offered? The words in Jeremiah are addressed to both Israel and Judah, the two kingdoms that made up the entire nation. God calls these separated people to “be my people.” The Gospel teaches us that this new covenant is not merely meant for the Jewish people.

Greeks, representatives of the entire world, came to see Jesus. In other words, all women and men of integrity are to be invited to this covenant. Jesus declares: “I will draw everyone to myself.”

Today we hear of a new covenant, a clean heart, a grain of wheat pregnant with fruitfulness. These are all poetic ways of describing the new way of living into which we can step if we so choose. The disarray of so much of our lives makes us realize that we must choose a different way of living. But radical transformation does not come without a price. For our sake, Jesus suffered dearly, and he insists: “Whoever serves me must follow me.” And there is the rub!

Now that our Lenten journey is almost over, what have we learned from the readings of this season? In what ways are we willing to change? Whom are we willing to help? To forgive? To what extent are we willing to die to our own selfishness so that the fruits of the

new covenant can be brought forward? The hour of decision has come.

## **Praying with Scripture**

- Read the psalm prayerfully, asking God for a clean heart and a steadfast spirit.
- Choose one or two ways in which you can live a renewed life.
- Pray for the grace to be faithful to your new insights, regardless of the price they may exact.

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## **What Would Jesus Do?**

APRIL 1, 2000

Fifth Sunday of Lent (B), April 9, 2000

"Give me back the joy of your salvation and a willing spirit sustain in me" (Ps. 51:14)

In these last two weeks of Lent, the readings draw our eyes to the crucified one, with a focus on what God has done for us. The promise of the new covenant embodies the aging Jeremiah's spiritual testament to an exiled people: that even though they have sinned in the past, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." It will be written on the hearts of the people, and their acceptance will not be taught but will arise from their

deep experience of forgiveness, "for I will forgive their evil doing and remember their sin no more." Though the term "new covenant" appears only here in the Old Testament, at the Last Supper Jesus will describe his self-offering as a new covenant (Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25).

Today's Gospel concludes John's presentation of the public ministry of Jesus and provides the bridge to the story of his final days. The Greeks who would like "to see" Jesus underscore the universal dimension of the lifting up and glorification of the Son of Man, when "I will draw everyone to myself." Having witnessed both the sadness of death and God's triumph over it (described in the preceding story of Lazarus) and having reached the hour of his imminent death, Jesus now speaks of the paradox of life through death. As the springtime festival of Passover nears, Jesus points to the mystery of the grain of wheat, which after seeming to lie dead in the soil now springs up throughout the land to sustain life.

This dying and rising provides a paradigm for discipleship. Whoever loves his life will lose it, and whoever hates it will gain eternal life.

These words seem jarring to an age aware of the dangers of self-loathing and lack of self-esteem. "Loving life" in John does not refer to the proper sense of dignity and joy that one should have as a graced person; it means a preference for "the world" and human glory that can blind a person to God's love. Hatred of one's life means rejection of the claims of the "world" and willingness to serve and follow Jesus. This becomes explicit in the next saying, "whoever serves me, must follow me."

This cost of losing one's life touches Jesus himself as he speaks, in the Synoptic Gospels' accounts of the events in Gethsemane, from the depths of his troubled soul, "Father, save me from this hour," while accepting that it was for the glory of his Father that he has come to the hour of his passion. As at his baptism in Mark, the barrier between heaven and earth is bridged, and a heavenly voice

accepts Jesus' offering, which Jesus then says was "for your sake," since by his death the power of evil will be broken.

The reading from the Letter to the Hebrews plays a similar symphony about the Passion in a different key. It speaks of Jesus "in the days of his flesh," a biblical expression for the sphere of weakness and suffering to which Christ was subject, as he prayed to the one who could save him from death. This does not mean avoiding physical death but rescue from the power and realm of death. In Hebrews Jesus is a compassionate high priest, who shares flesh and blood with God's sons and daughters, and who was himself tested through what he suffered so he could help others equally tested (2:14-16). Today's reading says that Jesus "learned obedience" from what he suffered. Biblical obedience is not primarily following the will of another, but a "deep listening"—in the case of Jesus, not only to his Father, but, as the compassionate one, to the sufferings of his brothers and

sisters. His life and suffering were a school of deep listening and compassion. This is the Jesus whose loving service and enduring presence we celebrate over the next two weeks.

The readings lead us into the deepest mysteries of Christian faith: the allure of "the world," the inevitability of death and suffering, even the call to embrace it, along with the ringing paradox that loss of human life is the gain of eternal life; that we have a compassionate high priest, whose soul was also troubled as he faced the abyss of death, but whose death was an enduring covenant of forgiveness inscribed with the promise that "where I am, there also will my servant be."



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Lent 5, 03/29/2009

Sermon on John 12:20-33, by David Zersen

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*Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee,*

*and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now*

*the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.*  
(NRSV)

## CHECKING THE NAME ON THE TENT

This week is the annual South by Southwest (SXSW) festival in Austin. Hundreds of thousands of people come from around the U.S. and some from around the world to experience the newest bands and the trendiest sounds on the planet. Some of the musicians are hoping to be heard by agents. Some of them want to hear the sounds being created by colleagues unknown to them. Many spectators love to go because they want to be where a crowd is. Some hope to meet a partner or have a one-night-stand. Some go simply because it's Spring Break and they have to be somewhere.

In the midst of these crowds there will be many lost souls. They may not have started

out that way, but as the days of the event mooch along, they realize that they didn't find what they were looking for. Or that those they thought were their friends didn't turn out to be friends. Or even more problematic, in the midst of the all the music and the noise, the sound and the fury, they may realize they don't know what this is all about-or whether their life has any meaning at all for them

This problem is not only discovered at SXSW. All around the United States, and around the world, for that matter, people are discovering that the big band sound and the promise of superficial affluence has led to a rather scary uncertainty in the market square. Those who were riding the waves of confidence are now finding that something was missing in the promise that said that if you followed the crowd you would find what the crowd was looking for. However, this what's called the "lemming's surprise." When we all chase one another over the cliff, we find that neither the crowd nor its leader knew what lay ahead.

A recent article *in USA Today* explored the false hope that uncertain times lift up through palm readers, soothsayers, fortunetellers, tarot card analysts and astrologers. When people have no sure foundation, and they are uncertain about what the future holds, they turn to those who promise to offer the gaze of Nostradamus or the wisdom of the Oracle at Delphi. In Austin, where I live, a woman who tells fortunes has been able to erect a very impressive limestone house on Highway 35 as one approaches the urban center. High fences around the mansion attest to some treasures inside. One can only wonder who the desperate people are who have made her rich.

And similarly, if one could set up tents midst the throngs of those gathered for SXSW or many another street festival or Renaissance Fair, he/she might discover many who peek inside the tent to find answers for their besetting questions-- whether about meaning or money, destiny or purpose. It's worth asking, when you yourself have uncertainty or

even despair, into which tents do you peek for answers? And, should you be looking right now, is there something here in this tent, this *domus ecclesiae*, this house of God, which can address your concerns?

I think that something like this was going on in today's Gospel lesson. Mobs of people were gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover Feast, largely a family festival. If you had no family in Jerusalem, it was uncertain what you would be doing when the families assembled at table. The noise and smells were overwhelming. People were buying and selling preparations. Natives of other countries were present as merchants. Some were bewildered, wondering what this could mean to them. Among them were a couple of Greeks, or at least Greek-speaking Jews, and they were thinking about checking out the Jesus tent. In any case, they found a Greek-speaker by the name of Philip and said, "We'd like to talk to Jesus." Unsure that he could just usher them into the tent, Philip checked with another

Greek-speaking friend, Andrew. They talked it over and both of them went to tell Jesus that he had visitors.

Jesus brings them in the tent (you realize that I'm dramatizing a little bit) and takes their hands in his. They are looking for answers and he has what they are looking for. He tells that that if a grain of wheat doesn't get buried in the ground and die, it just lies on the surface and is useless. But if it dies, and only then, it bears much fruit. If all you're interested in doing is saving your life-acquiring possessions, establishing reputations, becoming important, you will lose your life. You will end up with something that is useless. But if you concern yourself with the needs of others, you will fill your life with meaning and keep it forever.

These Greeks had gone into the right tent. One can only wonder what later became of them. Did they hear these words and follow them, or did they say, "Let's check out the Tarot Card tent?" This is the challenge

humans have always faced. You don't have to be a Bernard Madoff to want it all. We are greedy little gremlins from our youth. I have always believed that original sin is a valid theological concept. You don't have to be reasonable and educated to want it your way, to want what seems to fulfill you most. You just need to be human. It is the nature of humanness to want to be at the center of attention, to want to lead rather than to follow, to claim my rights before the rights of others.

This is why Jesus is different. This is why he points us away from ourselves, difficult as that may be-and different as it is from the style of religious phonies who preach self-aggrandizement, or the Gospel of Success. This is why the Lenten story has been a story about dying to one's self for five weeks now.

Ultimately, the Lenten story is about crucifixion, the time when those who refused to hear the story put an end to the storyteller,



at least so they thought. All along, however, Jesus has been showing people how to care for maligned and mistreated, alienated and disenfranchised (big words all). What troubled Jesus most of all was that people were being shoved aside in the name of God, in the name of religion. It was the religious leaders who created the barriers to acceptance for the poor, the lame, the blind, the leper. When he tried to show them that the heart of being a child of God was to be a lover of God's children, they said they had had enough and they crucified him. The very dying to one's self that Jesus had been lifting up all along as the basis for real life became objectified on Calvary. Can we ever make sense of this?

Some of this is familiar territory and some of this is hard to follow. Yet scary as this tent may be to some who are afraid to come to the church and hear the Gospel, Jesus is here today to tell us when it looks like all is lost or like we can't possibly make sense of a life which doesn't bargain to make us a winner, we

are on the threshold of opportunity. He himself had to struggle with this. He says, "Should I say, 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, giving myself for the sake of others is precisely the reason why I came to this hour." As St. Francis put it in his famous prayer, "It is in giving that we receive, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

How many are those who have looked at a challenge and said, "This is too big for me. If I do this, I won't be able to have that." And the bargain means that you settle for something for yourself and in the end get nothing at all. Or maybe a prison cell. Mr. Madoff knows the answer here.

By contrast, when Mother Theresa was faced with the first leper, I wonder what she wanted to say. There was surely a human voice in her that was dying to speak. And there was also a voice from Jesus dying to be heard in its own way. We know this very well as we are confronted with challenges and opportunities,

with the need to define ourselves and to affirm the faith that is within us.

In the midst of life's fairs and festivals, Passovers and Palm Sundays, there are many tents with names on them bidding for our attention. Sometimes we aren't sure what we're looking for. We don't know if life is meaningful or at a dead end. But before we do anything crazy, before we walk boldly into a tent we know nothing about, we ought to check name on it first.

Jesus is inside only one of them. And Philip and Andrew are with him, not to mention two Greeks. And there are hours to spend and a life to discover when we learn how to plant a seed and let it die before it rises.

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Lent 5, 03/29/2009

Sermon on John 12:20-33, by Walter W. Harms

### **So You'd Like to See Jesus?**

Like the Greeks in the Gospel, I think most of us would like to get a glimpse or more of this Jesus, they were so interested in. I believe that many "pilgrims" go to Palestine and visit the sites where it is known that Jesus visited. Perhaps in walking where he walked and seeing what he saw, Jesus will become more real to them. They will be able to visualize

him better, at least in their minds' eye and in their hearts. What kind of Jesus do you think they see? =C 2 Some artists rendering of what he thinks Jesus looked like? Some picture painted of Jesus holding a lamb in his arms? Perhaps a Jesus who welcomes children, picks them up and blesses them? And then there is the question: what kind of Jesus do you see? Have you perhaps come here to this place called a church to catch a glimpse of this person who performed miracles, healings, was master of the wind and wave, loved prostitutes and terrorists (Zealots), and so many more, perhaps even you? Are you and I looking to see a Jesus who will somehow in some extraordinary way see us through to the happy land of good economics, full employment, big 401(k)s and the good life? Do we come to see a Jesus who somehow takes away the bruises that we experience as men and women in this world: separation in divorce, children going nuts on us, people betraying us, having a personality warped by

an upbringing that left us with thoughts of self-loathing and then anger? So you'd like to see Jesus? What is Jesus' reply to Philip and Andrew who made this request to Jesus? Remember that these two were the first to bring people to Jesus-their brothers to Jesus. Now they bring more to Jesus. You will find in the answer Jesus gives a whole different perspective of Jesus, a vision of him that centers first of all on his mission in this world, then on his humanity and ours, and finally on the decision we are going to have to make about this picture of Jesus. Jesus begins by saying: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." Jesus without a doubt is this Son of Man who is at the same time the Son of the Most High God. His time of glory has come. Glory is one of those words we have a hard time defining. I like to think of it as the true revelation of showing what and who a person is. You will get a true picture of Jesus in the "hour" he is talking about. What is that hour? It is the hour of the cross. There on

Calvary's mountain you will see Jesus for what he truly is. We who come here so regularly are not shocked by the cross of Jesus anymore. We become used to thinking of him being crucified and then dying there. "So?" as our former vice president said in response to being asked about the soldiers killed in Iraq. The place of the cross of Jesus was not a nice place to be. It smelled putridly of blood, feces and urine. It was place of inhuman torture of a human being. It was a place where death and decay was expected and hoped for. And "the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" there. There you see who he truly is. In pain above pain, in physical distress beyond anything we can imagine or even are permitted to experience today. There is the true picture of who this Jesus is. The words ring out: 9 CFather, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing." Who the soldiers? No, you and I. We don't know what we are doing. We hurt others, lie, deceive, torture others with words

and more. We drop bombs on people as if it is our right and our duty. We use drugs creating devastation in every city and open warfare in many border towns. Do you and I really think we know what we are doing? Do we need a Father's forgiveness? Who is this Jesus who says that and so much more. He is on a mission of his Father, who because of Jesus and the Holy Spirit is also our heavenly Father now. His Father loves the whole world, every last man, woman, boy and girl and baby-every last one! We can hardly love our family and often don't. But this Father loves us even when we are dead to him, enemies of him, blind-have no vision of him at all as God and Lord of all. He loves and wants us to see him, have an intimate relationship with him and love to talk with him in prayer, praise and thanksgiving. But the rot of sin, the termite ridden house we think is so wonderful, the clothes we hide in which stink like the bottom of an outhouse must be removed, taken away, destroyed, and every enemy and the prince of



this world, devil must be driven out for us to be restored to the presence of this Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. See Jesus as the One who loves his Father, goes on the mission to destroy our sin and our pretence to goodness so that we might through Jesus see, yes, see, behold, get the sight of our loving heavenly Father. Jesus falls like a seed into the ground so that as he dies, many more like him, pure, loved by the Father, might be produced. This is his glory! This is who Jesus is! As Jesus promises, where he is, there his servants will be also. He loses his life so that many might be rescued from an incorrect, fatal picture of who he is. He removes the cataracts of our evil. Behold, Jesus dying on the cross because he loves the Father and the Father loves him and he loves us so much! You don't see this Jesus, you haven't got any idea who Jesus really is! It is in the mission of Jesus that God is glorified, seen for who he truly is. This mission of Jesus was not easy. He was not dancing through the tulips to do this for us.

His heart was troubled. It's hard to imagine, to think that this person Jesus was ever troubled. But it was. Ah, no one has seen the trouble I've experienced we say. Jesus who even knew how everything was going to turn out, didn't see what lay ahead of him as being a cake walk. He knew what death was about. It was God leaving forever what he had created and walking away to leave what was left to fend for itself. The cries of Jesus from the cross of "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" were real. His cries were the ones of experiencing what living without God's loving care and preservation of life and hope. It killed him! You have to see this Jesus or you will have missed seeing him at all. Jesus tells those who were around him that he was the light but that the light would be overtaken by darkness. He tells us to walk in the light because in the darkness of self-conceived thoughts about God, life, and the future is walking in total darkness. "Thy Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my way"

said the poet writer of ancient days. The John who wrote the words of our Gospel for today says Jesus is the Word. Jesus is the lamp. He is the sun of righteousness with healing for all our wounds caused by sin and iniquities. 20He is one who causes no shadows or darkness in our lives. I want you to trust Jesus as the light. Without Jesus making your every day a bright vision of his love and care, you will succumb to the darkness where there is only weeping and gnashing of teeth in despair. Trust Jesus; he will lead you always. I beg of you during this Lenten time to give yourselves anew to Jesus so that you may become sons and daughters who give light to others. All too often others get less than a clear picture of Jesus because in our brokenness we reflect a distorted Jesus. Today while you are in the light, renew your trust in Jesus and be the light of the world which you can and will be as you see this Jesus of the cross, the grave and the resurrection. What does Jesus see in you?

Enough of God's creation to want to be in you and with you. So come to the Sacrament, rejoicing that Jesus sees you clearly now, although we may only see him dimly. But the time will come of which the Sacrament is a foretaste when we shall see him clearly face to face. So you'd like to see Jesus? Did you get a little glimpse of him today? Amen.

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