

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, the Rev. David Ota
Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; Hebrews 12:18-29; Luke 13:10-17

Our texts for today include the call of the prophet Jeremiah, the letter to the Hebrews establishing the righteousness of God as a purifying and consuming fire, and the healing of a woman crippled by a spirit for eighteen years by Jesus on a Sabbath and the subsequent resistance by the leader of the synagogue. I found it difficult to find the connection between these texts, until I remembered what Jesus said in our gospel account two weeks ago, “It is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” The kingdom that is coming is not only relational but societal as well.

If the Father is to give us the kingdom, then that implies change. And we all know our response to change. We want other people to change, and we do not want to change. However, if we are to live into the change God wants for us then we will need to be willing to change.

In our gospel story for today, Jesus sees a woman crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. And he announces that she will be healed, and then lays hands on her. Now this happened to take place in a synagogue on the Sabbath. From the point of the woman who was healed and able to stand upright and give praise to God, this was welcome change. Who among us would not welcome an instant healing without all the physical therapy required? But change like that is rare. Change usually requires a lot of hard work.

However, from the point of view of the leader of the synagogue, this was unnecessary change to be resisted. Why couldn’t the healing happen a day other than the Sabbath?

We all know the story of the six days of Creation and on the seventh day God rested in the Book of Genesis. This is a rationale for Sabbath rest which occurs from Friday at sunset to Saturday at sunset. But how many of us like good Orthodox Jews do all our work before Friday at sunset so we can devote a day for rest and reflection with God and our family?

It is important to note that there is another tradition associated with the Sabbath, the tradition of remembering the liberation of the Hebrew slaves by God. In this gospel text, Jesus is said to “set free” or liberate the woman from the spirit. In other words there is never a time when it is not good to liberate others from a spirit of evil. God does not stop this liberating work because of the Sabbath, and neither did Jesus.

But from the point of view of the leader of the synagogue, observing the Sabbath Day of rest seemed more important than helping a woman tormented by a spirit. He was more concerned about his own stage of influence, and in the process he was resisting the change of God in Jesus to make the woman whole again.

It is not too different with us. Although we will admit that the world is not the way it should be, but in the meantime before the kingdom comes, we carve out a way of life which works for us. We lose sight of what God is doing in giving all of us the kingdom. So instead of cooperating with the power of God to give us the kingdom, we often resist like the leader of the synagogue, protecting our turf, and our way of life.

God does not stop the process of liberation and redeeming the world that is under oppression because of our resistance, because it is God’s good pleasure to give us the kingdom. As the author of the Letter

to the Hebrews argues, God is righteous and holy, a consuming fire. God will seek the change until all things “are shaken” and what remains is the spiritual or true self.

This gospel lesson is followed by the parable of the mustard seed (Luke 13:18-19) and the parable of the yeast (Luke 13:20-21). Both are examples of what the kingdom of God are like. A mustard seed though small grows into a tree providing a home for the birds of the air. In other words, the kingdom of God is hospitable for all, and begins small. A little leaven which a woman mixed in with the flour affects the entire loaf. In other words, the kingdom of God may start small, but will have great effect on the whole. These parables help us see how the healing of one woman may seem small at first but will have a greater effect in time. It is how God seeks to give us the kingdom.

In our lesson from Jeremiah for today, the prophet was resisting the call to serve, but God would not be denied. Jeremiah lived in Judah when the king was oppressive and corrupt. They had lost any moral authority to rule and the people had become weak as a nation. Jeremiah was called by God to call the king and the people to repent, but they did not repent, and in the end they were conquered by the Babylonians and the leadership was taken into exile. Jeremiah was given the charge by God over nations and kingdoms “to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” Jeremiah would witness the conquest of Jerusalem and the exile of the king and the leaders to Babylon. It would be decades before the exiles returned to rebuild Jerusalem.

Today our nation has an evil spirit. Signs of this evil include the daily gun violence and the mass gun shootings, the scapegoating of asylum seekers wanting refuge and the resistance to address climate change. Congress will soon be reconvening after Labor Day, and it remains to be seen if they will take any action to address gun violence. The administration does not make the connection between the American way of life and the mass migrations due to climate change. Instead families are separated in detention centers to serve as a deterrent to people who would seek asylum here.

Just as the leader of the synagogue resisted the healing of a woman on the Sabbath, our leaders and we ourselves could be found to be resisting God striving to give us the kingdom where people are made whole and not scapegoated or destroyed.

We need a Jeremiah today, so that our leaders and we as a people will repent. We will have to change our way of life from consuming so much that we harm the planet and our neighbors. We cannot be like the leader of the synagogue who did not recognize what God is doing. We need to make the connection between the way we live and notice how many in the world are losing livable conditions. Instead of scapegoating the vulnerable, we need to re-examine how we live, and whether there are harmful effects to the environment and to the more vulnerable people in the world.

So I invite you to consider how God is giving us the kingdom. What in the world and in our own lives does God want to change so that all of us in the world can live in peace and harmony?

I invite you to consider how we are like the woman with an oppressive spirit which burdened her only to be healed so she could stand upright and praise God. From what oppressive spirit do you need to be healed so you may give thanks to God in praise?

I invite you to consider how we are like the leader of the synagogue who doesn't want his world to change even if it means blessings for his vulnerable neighbors. What are the ways in which you are resisting the movement of God to give all of us the kingdom? What are you protecting which keeps

you separated from your neighbors? Remember, the Father wants to give us the kingdom, so we need to get out of the way if we are resisting. Change is difficult, but if we see our lives in the wider scope of God giving us the kingdom, the sacrificial changes we make will be meaningful to us.

Amen.

I propose to show that the Father seeks to give us the kingdom, and that means we will have to change or get out of the way so we can rejoice like the woman who suffered for eighteen years with a spirit of oppression and repent from being like the leader of the synagogue who was more concerned with protecting his way of life than rejoicing in the liberation of his neighbor.

The Collect

Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Old Testament

Jeremiah 1:4-10

The word of the LORD came to me saying,

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." But the LORD said to me,

"Do not say, 'I am only a boy';
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you,
Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,

says the LORD."

Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me,

"Now I have put my words in your mouth.
See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant."

The Response

Psalm 71:1-6

In te, Domine, speravi

- 1 In you, O LORD, have I taken refuge; *
let me never be ashamed.
- 2 In your righteousness, deliver me and set me free; *
incline your ear to me and save me.
- 3 Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe; *
you are my crag and my stronghold.
- 4 Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked, *
from the clutches of the evildoer and the oppressor.
- 5 For you are my hope, O Lord GOD, *
my confidence since I was young.
- 6 I have been sustained by you ever since I was born;
from my mother's womb you have been my strength; *
my praise shall be always of you.

The Epistle

Hebrews 12:18-29

You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. (For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear.") But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what is shaken-- that is, created things-- so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

The Gospel

Luke 13:10-17

Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

In preparation for this coming Sunday's worship, please pray this coming Sunday's Collect of the Day and read and reflect on the lessons assigned as printed below

Jeremiah 2:4-13; Psalm 81:1, 10-16; Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14:7-14

The Collect

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Old Testament

Jeremiah 2:4-13

Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. Thus says the LORD:

What wrong did your ancestors find in me
that they went far from me,
and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves?

They did not say, "Where is the LORD
who brought us up from the land of Egypt,
who led us in the wilderness,
in a land of deserts and pits,
in a land of drought and deep darkness,
in a land that no one passes through,
where no one lives?"

I brought you into a plentiful land
to eat its fruits and its good things.

But when you entered you defiled my land,
and made my heritage an abomination.

The priests did not say, "Where is the LORD?"
Those who handle the law did not know me;
the rulers transgressed against me;
the prophets prophesied by Baal,
and went after things that do not profit.
Therefore once more I accuse you, says the LORD,
and I accuse your children's children.
Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look,
send to Kedar and examine with care;
see if there has ever been such a thing.
Has a nation changed its gods,
even though they are no gods?
But my people have changed their glory
for something that does not profit.
Be appalled, O heavens, at this,
be shocked, be utterly desolate,
says the LORD,

for my people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me,
the fountain of living water,
and dug out cisterns for themselves,
cracked cisterns
that can hold no water.

The Response

Psalm 81:1, 10-16

Exultate Deo

- 1 Sing with joy to God our strength *
and raise a loud shout to the God of Jacob.
- 10 I am the LORD your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt and said, *
"Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it."
- 11 And yet my people did not hear my voice, *
and Israel would not obey me.
- 12 So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their hearts, *
to follow their own devices.
- 13 Oh, that my people would listen to me! *
that Israel would walk in my ways!
- 14 I should soon subdue their enemies *
and turn my hand against their foes.

15 Those who hate the LORD would cringe before him, *
and their punishment would last for ever.

16 But Israel would I feed with the finest wheat *
and satisfy him with honey from the rock.

The Epistle

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." So we can say with confidence,

"The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid.

What can anyone do to me?"

Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

The Gospel

Luke 14:1, 7-14

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

