

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, the Rev. David Ota

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

Good morning, beloved of God! Do you know you are God's beloved? Do you feel like God's beloved? Do you think like God's beloved? Do you act like God's beloved? I imagine our answers depend on what is happening in our lives. But first know this, God loves you and God's creation. Our lessons teach us this.

In the reading from book of Jeremiah, God is lamenting how God's own people, the house of Jacob and all the families of the house of Israel has forsaken the LORD God. And despite this, God still loves God's people. Even though the LORD God delivered their ancestors, over time they forgot how the LORD God saved them; they forgot the covenant promises, even the priests forgot; and instead they sought security in riches and political alliances with people whose gods were no gods! Even then, the LORD God wants them back.

It is one thing to love another; it is another thing whether that love and devotion is returned in like kind. What is God to do, when God's own people doesn't return God's love and doesn't know how to love the neighbor? The LORD God accused the people of two evils:

They have forsaken the LORD God, the living water and chased after water with cracked cisterns that they have made.

Are we guilty of these two sins: forsaking the LORD God and chasing after things which do not satisfy?

It is very easy to lose our way, to forget that we and the entire creation is beloved of God. When God the living water (the Spirit) is not sustaining us, we will feel wanting, thirsty for love. Instead of allowing God's love for us to be the foundation of our lives, we seek to make ourselves and our achievements the foundation of our lives. We begin to look for status among our peers. We begin to look for pleasure instead of righteousness and compassion.

In our gospel lesson for today, Jesus taught the Pharisee who was hosting a meal and his guests that God's ways are different from their ways. In their society like most societies there was a hierarchy in which the most prominent person would be the focal point, and those sitting closest would have higher status. This is the way of the world, but not the way of God.

Instead Jesus taught that God's way is not to focus on the one with power, but on the ones in need. Instead of hosting a party for the well connected, in the realm of God those who are forgotten become the focus. Instead of seeking power and prestige, God's children are to humble themselves and not seek to climb the social ladder of prestige, but the way of loving service.

Have you ever felt the difference between a culture in which people are seeking power and prestige, and a culture that seeks to serve the ones in need first? In the former, there is competition and jealousy; in the latter there is joy.

Once we come to accept God's free gift of love to us, and make that the foundation of our lives, we don't need to seek prestige and affirmation from others. We are then free to live in relationships of mutual affection.

In the section of the letter to the Hebrews for today, the author writes, “Let mutual love continue.” There is mutuality in love between God and God’s people, and between members of the church. If God’s love is to be made tangible, it must begin with and among those who believe they are God’s beloved ones. It gets back to one person loving another, and another person returning that love and devotion in like kind. Unless there is mutual love, then there will be a break-down in the relationship. Without mutuality one of the parties will go and seek to fill the void from another. But if we truly receive God’s love and return it as we seek to serve others, then there will not be a void in our hearts.

So the question is “do we act as God’s beloved ones?” If we can both receive God’s love and return it and share it with others, then we will also have room in our hearts to be hospitable to those outside of our circles, those who are strangers to us. In this way, we begin to act like God’s beloved ones. We are here in this life to extend the love of God to others.

The early church was persecuted and was counter-cultural to the Roman Empire. The empire of God’s reign was seeking to free people from the harm of the Roman Empire, the empire of domination. As we have become citizens of the societies in which we live, we can strive to reform the societies. An example of how our society is contrary to God’s reign is the detention of children and adults who are seeking asylum. Whereas we have standing and voice that the early church did not have in the Roman Empire we can speak out against these unholy practices of inhospitality to the most vulnerable in God’s world. In this way we can care for the most vulnerable among us.

As beloved of God, we are to honor our promises to one another, and marriage is a most sacred promise to honor and to love. When we fail to honor our commitments, we are called to repentance to rebuild the relationship by keeping our vows. This practice is also kept by society at large, and is not only a Christian practice. But we all have a propensity to fail, and when we do, the person breaking the vow needs to repent, so forgiveness can renew the relationship.

As beloved of God, we are called to love people and not money. Money is not the root of evil, but the love of money. We who have received God’s love and mercy are called to be generous as a way to show love to our neighbors who struggle.

We are also invited to remember the ones who have shared God’s love and mercy to us. God’s love is usually mediated through others. Who were the ones who loved you into faith? Remember them, and then try to emulate them.

Do you know you are God’s beloved? Do you feel like God’s beloved? Do you think like God’s beloved? Do you act like God’s beloved? I hope you know that you are God’s beloved, and that you willingly and intentionally return God’s love for you as you love others in your life. When you fail in loving God or others, repent and seek to restore relationships of mutuality. In this way you will please the LORD our God as God’s beloved ones.

Amen.

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."

I propose to show that although we are created to be God's beloved ones, we soon forget and choose a more self-directed way, making our own path in life, seeking prestige and comfort instead of remaining humble before God and neighbor. But Jesus and his church calls us to remember that as God's beloved ones, we have all that we need in God's love and we can live in that love by caring for those in our circles and showing hospitality to the stranger, by remembering the imprisoned and tortured, by honoring our marriage vows, by loving people and not money, and by following the example of Christian leaders who have given their lives in loving service so that we knowing who and whose we are will spend our lives not chasing the dreams of the world to build themselves, but will spend our lives seeking ways to love and serve both God and neighbor.

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 18:1-11; Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17; Philemon; Luke 14:25-33

The Collect

Grant us, O Lord, to trust in you with all our hearts; for, as you always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so you never forsake those who make their boast of your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Old Testament

Jeremiah 18:1-11

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

Then the word of the LORD came to me: Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the LORD: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

The Response

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17

Domine, probasti

- 1 LORD, you have searched me out and known me; *
you know my sitting down and my rising up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
- 2 You trace my journeys and my resting-places *
and are acquainted with all my ways.
- 3 Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, *
but you, O LORD, know it altogether.
- 4 You press upon me behind and before *
and lay your hand upon me.
- 5 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; *
it is so high that I cannot attain to it.
- 12 For you yourself created my inmost parts; *
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- 13 I will thank you because I am marvelously made; *
your works are wonderful, and I know it well.

- 14 My body was not hidden from you, *
while I was being made in secret
and woven in the depths of the earth.
- 15 Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb;
all of them were written in your book; *
they were fashioned day by day,
when as yet there was none of them.
- 16 How deep I find your thoughts, O God! *
how great is the sum of them!
- 17 If I were to count them, they would be more in number than the sand; *
to count them all, my life span would need to be like yours.

The Epistle

Philemon 1-21

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier,
and to the church in your house:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love-- and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother-- especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

The Gospel

Luke 14:25-33

Now large crowds were traveling with Jesus; and he turned and said to them, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions."