

**Bible Study**  
**Proper 20, Year C**  
**September 18, 2016**

**[RCL] Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; Psalm 79:1-9; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13**

**Jeremiah 8:18-9:1**

There are times of great suffering in which we may feel that all hope is lost and that there may never be joy in our souls again. This may be triggered by the loss of a loved one or from a tragedy in your local community or nation. There are painful events in our lives that shake us to our core and may even bring questions to our faith, diminishing our sense of hope. At other times, it may feel like our prayers in these times are not being answered.

Jeremiah asks:

Is there no balm in Gilead?  
Is there no physician there?  
Why then has the health of my poor people  
not been restored?

Laments such as this are important to place before the throne of God, as we complain to a compassionate God who deeply cares about us and that which troubles us. There are times in our lives that we need to reclaim the old tradition of lament, a significant tradition that is largely absent in our common life as the Church. Often, we need to air our grievances before we can begin to see hope again. Sometimes, we even need to get angry at God. God can take it. God will also use our vulnerability that we have expressed as a means to bestow grace upon us.

Through this we remember that there is hope in the resurrection, that there is a balm in Gilead, and that God continues to restore all things through Jesus Christ.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Reflect one or two painful times in your life. How did your relationship with God feel in those times?
2. How comfortable to you feel complaining to God, or getting angry with God? How well do you practice lament?
3. How has God shown you through your pain that there is hope rather than hopelessness, light rather than darkness? How have you been reassured of God's goodness and mercy?

**Psalm 79:1-9**

This psalm is also another prayer of lament to God, likely written in the wake of some sort of national tragedy that had befallen God's people. This takes a different tone than the above lament from the Prophet Jeremiah. In this lament, the author is calling out to God, asking for God to punish those who have unleashed evil upon the people and God's temple.

One of the beautiful things about the Psalms is that they show us the whole range of human emotion in our spiritual relationship with God. The fact is, sometimes we do have vengeful feelings and we do wish for God's wrath to be unleashed on someone who has done a great evil. This psalm serves as a reminder that these feelings of anger in response to a wrongdoing are nothing to be ashamed of, but rather are a natural part of our human experience and thus are appropriate to bring to God in prayer (regardless of what God chooses to do in response to that prayer).

Questions for Reflection:

1. Have you ever been wronged in such a way that you feel vengeful toward another person?
2. How do you address those feelings in prayer?
3. How do you come to terms with the reality that vengeance belongs to God and not to us?
4. Can you shift your focus, and begin to pray for the person who wronged you?

### **1 Timothy 2:1-7**

Speaking of prayer. In the first letter addressed to Timothy, Paul writes that we should include everyone in our prayers, naming supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings as different categories of prayer. We are called as Christians to pray for our neighbors, to pray for our enemies, to pray for our leaders, to pray for our Church and our world, and...everyone.

He writes:

“This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all.”

Questions for Reflection:

1. Look back at the questions about lamentation and praying to God about someone who has done evil toward you. There is a significant shift in what happens when you get the anger out of your system and instead begin to pray FOR the person (or people). What would it take for you to begin to pray for God's mercy to be upon them? Can you intercede for God's saving grace to be with them? What do you think changes in you when you do that?
2. Who do you pray for on a daily basis?
3. What kinds of prayer do you offer to God in your daily prayers?
4. How might this passage inform your practice?

### **Luke 16:1-13**

“You cannot serve God and wealth.” It must be getting close to stewardship “season.” Our use of money seems to be indicative of the nature of our relationship with God. Perhaps it is not just money, but all that is ours. “Ours” is the operative word here. Wealth can become a false idol, a

violation of the First Commandment, when we turn to the love of money over the love of God and money. This happens when we willfully forget that God is the source of all good things and that all we have is but a gift from God. They are not ours, rather we have been graced with the ability to become stewards over that which is God's.

God calls us to be faithful stewards. Jesus says, "Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much." This could be understood to mean faithful stewards may be entrusted with even more. Another reading is that if we cannot be trusted with something small, why would we ever be trusted in something more significant? Our faithfulness relies in remembering who God is as the creator and giver of all good gifts. We are recipients, not entitled to what we possess. This is important for us to remember, lest the things we believe are ours begin to possess us.

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. How does this passage challenge you?
2. Do you sometimes feel entitled to the things you have, or do you recognize that they are gifted to you?
3. Have you ever thought about writing a gratitude list each day? It is amazing how this practice can bring the issues of this passage into perspective in your life and how it can inform your prayer practice.
4. What are some of the pressures and stresses that make being a faithful steward difficult? How can God help you through those struggles in order that you might maintain faithful stewardship?
5. Do you feel that your use of time, talent, and treasure rightly reflect your relationship with God and the gifts that God has given you? (Remember the biblical principal of the tithe: 10% of the "first fruits" given to God in gratitude.)

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