

Bible Study
Proper 21, Year C
September 25, 2016

[RCL] Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15; Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16; 1 Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15

In our passage today, we hear about a besieged city. Jeremiah is told by God to buy land. He buys it for 30 pieces of silver, a hefty sum that is echoed later in the story of Judas' death. If the three most important things in real estate are location, location, and location, the fourth thing is **DON'T BUY LAND THAT'S ABOUT TO BE CONQUERED BY THE BABYLONIANS!**

Only a foolish buyer would make such a purchase. Only a buyer who thought his people would own that land again. Jeremiah shows us that God sometimes calls us to make an investment that may seem foolish today, but is a statement of faith for the future.

- What faith-filled, foolish decision is God calling you to make?
- Have you ever given a gift in an uncertain time?

Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16

While serving as an Army chaplain in Baghdad, Iraq I received a gift in the mail. It was a camo handkerchief that had Psalm 91, "The Soldier's Psalm," printed on it. We were supposed to put it in our helmets to keep us safe. The legend was that a unit in World War II had a zero casualty rate because everyone carried these handkerchiefs. Soon, boxes and boxes of them arrived from the USA and thousands of soldiers were stuffing them in their helmets.

Although I memorized this Psalm, in the King James Version of course, as a child, the Psalm suddenly took on a new meaning for me. That was around ten years ago, and my conversation with this Psalm is still ongoing. This Psalm is beloved since it promises so much. Deliverance from disease, massacre, and falling. It was so over-the-top that the Satan quotes it to Jesus when he tempts him. Was Satan tempting me in Iraq with these same words? Is Satan still tempting me as I write this reflection?

Around the same time I put the hanky in my helmet I also started praying the Compline office with some other Army chaplains. Even though Psalm 91 was the longest choice, it was often picked by my fellow chaplains because it spoke to us in our uncertainty.

Today, I understand the Psalm liturgically, and refuse to make it a talisman—a rabbit's foot in war. It comforts me not because I think it will keep me from all suffering (for it certainly did not in Iraq), but because it centers me in my relationship with God and with the community I pray Compline with as often as I can.

- How does our practice (Praying together, reading, meditating) give us confidence during difficult times?
- IS there a difference between praying alone and praying with others?

1 Timothy 6:6-19

Since we are mere days away from electing a new President of the United States, St. Paul's political statements in this letter to his disciple, Timothy, give us much to ponder. He urges Timothy to be strong in the face of judgement by political rulers. He uses the example of Jesus to show him how it's done. Pontius Pilate was probably not elected, but was likely appointed by Tiberius, the second emperor of Rome who succeeded Caesar Augustus, who appears in Luke's nativity.

Roman Caesars were not kings. They actively avoided royal titles like emperor or king because of their ongoing insistence that Rome was still a republic. But, in Judea and elsewhere in the empire, everyone knew better. They knew they were kings. At Jesus' trial the crowd shouts, "We have no king but Caesar!"

Even though Herod and his sons were called "King" they still had to buy their kingship from the emperor in Rome. It is in this context that St. Paul's spiritual statement, that Jesus is "the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords" becomes a political statement.

The Apostle reminds Timothy, and us, that money or political power are not the ultimate authority in our lives.

- How might you pray the words, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done" during this election season?
- How do we remind our fellow American citizens of our king of kings and lord of lords?

Luke 16:19-31

When I was about eight, I was surprised by the death of our family dog, Licorice. I did not like the dog. She scared me with her incessant barking, so I avoided her. When she bit a boy in the neighborhood, she had to be killed. Later, we found out the boy often threw stones at her, but a bite was a bite.

I am sadder now than I was then about her death. Back then, I was just surprised. The most surprising thing about her death was the slow realization that she was NEVER COMING BACK. Never. Not in a day, in a week, or in five hundred years.

Is that why death is so disturbing and fascinating to us? Is that why this story Jesus tells about the rich man and Lazarus is so compelling?

We often abstract this story to figure out how Hades works, or to determine the final abode of the rich and the poor. The larger point of Jesus story is not so much about Lazarus and the rich man, or even Abraham. The main point is about himself. He is inviting us to contemplate the stranglehold of unbelief that caused his original audience and us to pull the wool over our own eyes, so we cannot be open to the kingdom of

love and justice that Jesus is inaugurating. As C.S. Lewis observed, “The door to hell is locked from the inside.”

- What experience brought you to consider the love of Jesus?
- What are you fooling yourself about?

Bio: The Rev. Dr. David W. Peters serves as the Assistant Rector at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Austin, TX. Before parish ministry, he served as an Army chaplain in Iraq. He is the author of Post-Traumatic God: How the Church Cares For People Who Have Been to Hell and Back.

Published by the Office of Formation of The Episcopal Church, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

© 2016 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.