



Pentecost 10

August 17, 2025

St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Portland, OR

THE LESSONS: Jeremiah 23:23-29; Psalm 82; Hebrews 11:29-12:2; Luke 12:49-56

THE SERMON: “When Human Bonds Are Broken...”

Grace and Peace to you in the NAME of GOD: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

You’ve probably heard the old joke about the little boy who ate everything on his plate but refused to eat two nasty, shriveled prunes. His mother begged and pleaded with him and, finally, threatened him that, if he wouldn’t eat the prunes, God was going to be very angry. The kid stubbornly refused and the mother, who was at her wits’ end, sent him to his room. Almost immediately, as he was going up the stairs, a storm set in with thunder, lightning, and howling winds. Thinking that her son might be terrified by the idea that God was mad at him, the mother hurried up to his room to reassure him. She opened the door quietly, expecting to find him burrowed under the covers. But, no, he was at the window, staring at the lightning and shaking his head and scolding God, “God, it was just two lousy prunes. It really isn’t worth all this fuss, is it? Get over it!”

Jeremiah 23:23-29

I really don’t think God cares about two lousy prunes but God does care about those who misrepresent God’s commandments. In our First Lesson, Jeremiah is warning the Jews in the southern kingdom of Israel that God knows their infidelity and sinfulness, “Am I a God near by, says the Lord, and not a God far off? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?” Jeremiah’s prophecy digs deeper, “I have

heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I have dreamed!' How long? Will the hearts of the prophets ever turn back—those who prophesy lies... They plan to make my people forget my name by their dreams..., just as their ancestors forgot my name for Baal." It's sounds a lot like Paul's warning to the Colossians that we heard a few weeks ago, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ." We know that Jeremiah was writing to Jews who lived in the southern Kingdom of Judah after Babylon had taken over the northern of Israel by conquering Assyria. Jeremiah was warning Judah that God was not happy with their twisted and distorted religious practices as their priests and leaders accused Jeremiah and other prophets of "fake news." They prophesied that Judah and Jerusalem would not fall and misled the people to trust in their words and failed to turn back to the Lord Almighty. They trusted in alliances with Egypt and other kingdoms. They didn't trust in God.

Psalm 82

The priest, Asaph, spoke to that in today's psalm, as in Jeremiah's prophesy, God holds judgment and asks humankind, "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?" Asaph is saying that God's kingdom should give justice to the weak and the orphan and rescue the weak and the needy and deliver them from the hand of the wicked. Then, Asaph makes a strange observation that God says "You are gods, children of the Most High... nevertheless, you shall die like mortals and fall like any prince." What does the mean? I think Asaph is acknowledging that we are created in God's image but makes it clear that we are not God because we have the free will to choose to love or not love. When we choose to love, we are like God; conversely, when we choose not to love, we die - we separate ourselves from God. I wonder, if God came to judge America, he would would recall today's psalm, "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." Are we brave enough to ask God

as Asaph did, “Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations belong to you!” Do we really want God to judge us?

Luke 12:49-56

As the writer of the Hebrews says, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit... and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” That seems to be what Jesus is teaching in today’s gospel: “I have come to cast fire upon the earth... Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!” What? This doesn’t sound like Jesus! I thought Jesus is about love and unity, not division and conflict. But, remember Jesus often uses hyperbole, similar to the Jewish comedian, Woody Allen, and makes exaggerated claims not meant to be taken literally. Isn’t that what this gospel does? As that old saying attests, “the gospel comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.” Like Asaph, the psalmist, Jesus basically asks, “How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?” And, since many in the crowd are farmers, he says, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain’... And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens.” In other words, he’s asking the crowd when they see the injustice and the exploitation of the poor and the “kowtowing” to the rich and famous, can’t they see that isn’t God’s will? And, yet, they allow it. Why is God giving these lessons to Americans today? Oh, I know only Christians who use the Common Lectionary - Lutherans, Episcopalians, Methodists, and a few others - (only those Christians) will hear these lessons today. But, what is God revealing to any Christian whenever we read it?

Hebrews 11:29-40, The Call and the Challenge

Will it be the downfall of the nation as Jeremiah prophesied? Or will it be like the oppression of a godless Roman Empire as Jesus and the disciples endured? Or is it something that history hasn’t revealed yet? The writer of Hebrews looked back and recalled the mighty Egyptians were drowned, the walls of Jericho collapsed, and the pagan kingdoms were subdued by the judges and King David and the prophets. Essentially, when Israel rejected God, disaster followed. But, despite the horrors of the oppression of earthly powers by torture and executions and terror, the faithful

endured. However, God allowed unbearable pain to fall even upon the faithful. As our lesson said, "Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect." What sustained them? Human rulers make promises, but fail to keep them. Hamas promised Palestinians a future and, after a senseless massacre, brought devastation and destruction. The Prime Minister of Israel is promising the destruction of the perpetrators of the horror which has resulted in a holocaust as deadly and atrocious as the prisons of Dachau and Auschwitz. When will we learn that violence and military power is not the answer to peace? As long as humans operate under a dualistic reality - right vs wrong, liberal vs conservative, left vs right, Gentile vs Jew, black vs white, gay vs straight - (a dualistic reality), then there will be winners and losers. So, why does the writer of Hebrews keep talking about faith? How does it relate to God's truth? Maybe he's telling us to stop thinking dualistically. Maybe the way to think like Jesus is to think in trinity: right or wrong and God; liberal, conservative, God; left, right, God; black, white, God. The writer of Hebrews is teaching us that God need to be the center of all our decisions. Because God is love, instead of arguments and debates, Christians would be having conversations, respecting others' views, and, despite any differences, acting graciously and civilly. In trinitarian thought, the only right decision is love. As one of mentors taught me, "Life is not about right or wrong, liberal or conservation; life is about being open, not closed." As St. Paul told us in his famous "love chapter" in Corinthians, "Love does not insist on its own way." American politicians have so much to learn about governing. Until they learn what Jesus has shown us, we will not receive what God has promised, but our lessons encourage us to be faithful and the Spirit will sustain us. So, even in a time such as this when human bonds are breaking and we lack the love to restore the hope of healing, we pray that God the Spirit will come into our world of stress and set us free and grant us peace. And, because God is a the Creator of new beginnings, may God the Holy Spirit use us as a means of blessing and renew our faith. As our hymn prays, when human bonds are broken, may God restore the hope of healing.