

BIBLE STUDY
August 12, 2019

The Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jeremiah 38: 4-6, 8-10

Luke 12: 49-53

Hebrews 12: 1-4

1. Jeremiah 38: 4-6, 8-10

- Jeremiah: one of the four major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.
- Jeremiah was prophet during the reigns of Kings Josiah, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Josiah initiated a reform that Jeremiah supported, but that reform ended upon the death of Josiah. Jehoiachin allowed the corruption and apostasy to creep back in. Jeremiah opposed his policies which lead to the capture of Jerusalem by Babylon's ruler, Nebuchadnezzar. During this time, Jeremiah's lot was public disgrace, arrest and imprisonment. The laments of Jeremiah are often seen as a prefigurement of the passion of Jesus. During the reign of Zedekiah, a false prophet, Hananiah, convinced Zedekiah that the power of Babylon was waning and urged Zedekiah to revolt. Nebuchadnezzar retaliated with the capture and destruction of Jerusalem.
- The selection we read this Sunday reflects this period before the Babylonian (or Chaldean) destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah tells Zedekiah and the princes of Jerusalem of the impending doom, but they do not want to hear it. The princes force the weak and vacillating king to put Jeremiah to death.
- Ebed-Melech, an advisor to the king, persuades the king to save Jeremiah. Ebed-Melech is an Ethiopian---an African man. In the Bible, Africa is the standard of excellence and the measure of greatness. It would be a status symbol for Zedekiah to have an Ethiopian as an advisor. That Ebed-Melech had such access to the king, felt confident enough to criticize and condemn the princes of Jerusalem, and to change the mind of the king show how important and influential he was.
- Cushite is another name for an African or an Ethiopian. **Cushite** may refer to: the historical Kingdom of Kush, an ethnolinguistic group indigenous to Northeast Africa Cushitic peoples; a biblical tribal name; see Cush (Bible) the natives of the Horn of Africa region.
- The princes do not want to hear the truth that Jeremiah speaks. The fate of the prophet is that his or her words are not believed. The people hear what they want to hear. And close their ears to what is troubling or upsets them.
- Zedekiah is a weak and vacillating ruler. "For the king could do nothing with them (the princes)." He had no power over them. He changes his mind as soon as Ebed-Melech speaks to him—not so much because he recognized the truth as he does not know what he believes.

2. Luke 12: 49-53

- Jesus is on his journey to Jerusalem; he has resolutely determined to go to the city where death awaits him.
- Set the earth on fire: John the Baptist said the Messiah would baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit. Fire is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, e.g. tongues of fire at Pentecost. Fire is a symbol of purifying, e.g. gold purified by fire. All these meanings point to Jesus' mission to bring conversion and change (metanoia). "Repent and believe in the Gospel." Set on fire with love of God.
- How I wish it were already blazing: an insight into Jesus' heart and soul. It expresses his deep desire that God's will be accomplished. He deeply desires to fulfill his mission.
- A baptism with which I must be baptized: Baptism=his death on the cross. Like a person being plunged into the waters without having any control, Jesus' death will require himself to abandon himself into his Father's hands. Jesus is not speaking about a sacramental baptism, but rather the colloquial "baptism of fire." However, it does make an association between his death and resurrection and baptism.
- How great is my anguish until it is accomplished: Another insight into Jesus' heart and soul. The specter of the cross weighs heavy upon him. Jesus has personally witnessed crucifixions. He was very aware of what a terrible death it was.
- Before there can be peace, there must be a probing and scrutinizing of inner thoughts and feelings. Simeon had prophesied that the secret "thoughts of many hearts will be revealed" by the Messiah Jesus. Jesus forces people to make a decision. His message affects them deeply. This kind of probing of the heart will cause division and hostility among people. Families will be divided over Jesus. This was the actual situation: For some to accept and believe in Jesus caused a division in the family. Devout Jewish families were torn apart by a member becoming a disciple of Jesus. This turmoil must be passed through before arriving at peace.

3. Hebrews 12: 1-4

- After having spoken about the faith of Abraham, the author goes on to speak about the faith of Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets plus many anonymous persons who suffered greatly because of their faith. So great was their faith that "the world was not worthy of them." But they did not see the fulfillment of what was promised them. God had a plan that we should see the fulfillment.
- **12: 1** We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses: the author imagines a stadium with a crowd of people, cheering the contestants on to victory. Those who have gone before us are cheering us on to victory. This passage is a basis for why we venerate the saints. They cheer us on to victory. We are part of the communion of saints.

- **1b:** Because of their prayers and support, we try harder. We cast off the burden of sin that clings to us and we persevere in running the race and not give up.
- **2:** all the while we keep our focus on Jesus who is the leader and perfecter of faith. The example of Jesus in his sufferings should give us courage and perseverance in ours. Jesus kept his eye on the prize. He kept the joy in focus and did not let the pain or the shame deter him.
- **3:** Jesus' victory gives us strength. He did it for us. Because he endured, we do not grow weary or lose heart.
- **4:** We should be ready to shed blood for Christ—even if that has not yet happened.