

**Sermon: 2019/09/01 (12th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C) -
Jeremiah 2:4-13; Psalm 81:1,10-16; Hebrews 13:1-8,15-16 & Luke
14:1,7-14_BTR**

[Invite children to the front.]

Jeremiah - *the prophet* - was very worried about his country, "Judah."
And about his countrymen and friends, "the Israelites."
They were scared of the armies of Babylon, and so they had gone to the king of
Egypt, Neco II [46:2], and asked for his help to fight the Babylonians for them.
But this was a *big* mistake.
Neco was another horrid bully just like Babylon was a horrid bully.
In fact, you could say that both of them were a very "*bad crowd*."

Have you heard that expression?
Maybe your mum or your dad warns you not to hang around with a "*bad crowd*."
That's the naughty children at school.
- who speak back to their teachers and use curse words or are mean.
And maybe, like the Israelites, you hang around with them and do the things that
they like to do because you think it will protect you from getting hurt or "*picked*"
on by them?

But Jeremiah said: "Thus, says the Lord..." *if* you spend lots of time with other
people who aren't nice or kind; if you spend lots of time with people who are
greedy and selfish and liars, you become like them.

He said: "It's like you are a '*cistern*' [2:13, 14:3]."

Do you know what that is?

[Wait for response.]

Yep!

A well.

(Here's one I've made.) [Bring out model.]

A '*cistern*' is a well, which is for holding water.

But Jeremiah said that his people were '*cracked cisterns*', and what was coming
out of them was bad.

It was bad because that's what they had exposed themselves to.

See: [Show with model.]

Now, the people who heard Jeremiah criticising them for "*hanging out*" with
horrible Neco (and the Egyptians) didn't like this!

Oh no.

They didn't like him saying that they were 'cracked cisterns' with badness *pouring* out of them, [2:13] and so they threw poor old Jeremiah into a *real* cistern!

But if it is true that we are like cisterns, and if what goes in is bad - the things we see and listen to - that's what comes out.

It must *also* be true - it seems to me - that if we spend our time with God and listen to Him instead, then *that's* what would come "pouring" out.

His love, through me.

His word, the Bible - the truth, through me.

His spirit of charity and forgiveness.

Let's pray: ...

[Dismiss children.]

You may not have realized this, but Jesus teaches us *three* lessons this morning.

It *looks* like two - and they're connected: they're both about *humility*.

but it *looks* like two lessons if you're only *listening* to what He says.

You need to "see" what He does too.

The first lessons, then, are, as I've said, about "humility."

This has been called the *preeminent* virtue of discipleship.

Our *highest* calling as 'Children of God'.

To be *humble*.

And most of us are *really* bad at it, right?

(I know I am!)

And that's because we're unpracticed.

Now, walking into a room - somebody *else's* room - and just sitting down wherever, not waiting for the host to say "over here" or, "not there" - that's not humble.

That's arrogant.

It's arrogant because it suggests that you think you're entitled to sit, well, *anywhere!*

That the fact you just showed up is doing some big favor to the host, and whatever happens next is surely going to be about *you* and is for *your* benefit.

And Jesus, we're told - this morning, watches these Pharisees "streaming" into a room to eat dinner, and all of them were jostling each other, and making a straight line to sit at what they each thought was the best spot to eat.

The best spot where *they* can be seen,

the best spot where *they* will be the centre of attention.

Because their conversation and their anecdotes must be the best, yes?

And none of them realise that their 'leader' - as he is called in the text (by *Luke*) - has thrown this party not for them but for *Christ's* sake.

Why would they realize that?

Well, they don't ask.

And He's young; they're old.

He's poor; they're distinguished and respected.

He's a rebel, and they're... "pillars of the establishment."

To them, it is just unthinkable, then, that *He* might be the one to teach *them*.

That *He* should be the one to speak and for them to politely listen.

Surely, it must be the other way round!

That's their presumption.

And can you imagine how excruciating it must have been when the 'leader' of that group had to start moving people around?

The red faces.

The awkwardness.

The muttering.

The forced smiles and feigned willingness to comply.

Wow.

Egos got bruised that evening.

"Bruised" badly.

But that's because they had such big ones in the first place.

The humble person - the *Christian* - is the one who is *genuinely* happy to wait to make sure that everyone else has a seat.

The humble person - the *Christian* - is the one who would *hate* to be seated if it meant somebody else must stand.

But would *actually* prefer to give up their place, *choosing* to believe that the other person, *whoever they might be*, and *however they might look*, is probably more deserving than they are.

The humble person - the *Christian* - is the one who goes into a job interview thinking to themselves not, "I hope *I* get this job," but rather: "I hope the one who needs it most gets it."

Is that what you think?

Is that how you operate?

This is *true* humility.

And, like I said, most of us - especially me - are *terrible* at it.

Allow me, then, to read you a quote from a book that many of us were studying in Lent - *Beginning to Pray* by Archbishop Anthony Bloom:

'The word humility comes from the Latin word "humus" which means fertile ground. To me, humility is not what we often make of it: ... humility is the situation of the earth. The earth is always there, always taken for granted, never remembered, always trodden on by everyone, somewhere we cast and pour out all the refuse, all [that] we don't need. It's there, silent and accepting everything[,] and[,] in a miraculous way[,] making out of all the refuse new richness in spite of corruption, transforming corruption itself into a power of life and a new possibility of creativeness, open to the sunshine [and] open to the rain...' [n.1]

The final lesson for us, I think - the *third* one, which I mentioned you might've missed - is not something that Jesus said at all to those presumptuous Pharisees that night.

It was His action as He entered the room.

Read "between the lines."

And what do you find?

That, seemingly, He stood there, in the doorway for a moment, scrutinising its occupants; evaluating.

That He *paused* before opening His mouth.

He appears to have "paused" and meditated, just for a second or two.

And didn't rush to any judgment.

And what a great rule of life that is!

Most of us most of the time jump to conclusions about people and their situations. Most of us most of the time fail to really *examine* and *probe* the issues and questions that abound.

So that our opinions, our politics, our theology, our preferences are really quite *underdeveloped* and not thoroughly thought through.

Which is ironic because we pride ourselves as a species on being rational.

We're the intellectual primate - the hairless monkey with "smarts."

And yet, by-and-large, we act so instinctively; so...reflexively; so...shortsightedly.

But Jesus says, 'Consider the ravens', and 'Consider the lilies of the field': [Lk. 12:24,27].

In other words, spend less time just *re-acting*, and more time meditating to get perspective, *and then* engage.

And maybe what you'll find by doing that is that humility - being humble - is not only virtuous *in principle* but is a better *strategy* to negotiate this fleeting, crowded and sometimes difficult journey we call *human existence*.

Let's take a moment to reflect.

Footnotes:

1. Bloom, A. (1970), *Beginning to Pray*, Mahwah, N. J.: Paulist Press, 35.