

**Sermon: 2019/10/06 (17th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C) -
Lamentations 1:1-6; Psalm 137; 2 Timothy 1:1-14; & Luke
17:5-10_BTR**

[Invite children to the front.]

Have you ever taken a *vacation*?

[Wait for response.]

Have you ever taken a vacation *abroad*? (That is, in a "foreign" country?)

[Wait for response.]

Oh! Where have you been?

[Wait for response.]

Well, one of the places that I would love to visit one day is, Egypt.

Egypt is a "magical" place.

Land of the Nile - the longest river in the world; *full* of crocodiles and hippos and water-borne diseases:

Doesn't that sound great?!

Land of the pyramids.

And the Sphinx.

Land of statues and tombs, mummies and deserts...

Egypt must be a *wonderful* place to see;

and that's where Jeremiah the prophet eventually found himself!

Last week, remember: he was in the city of Jerusalem, which was being attacked by the Babylonians.

Well, the city fell.

And in the confusion, he managed to escape with some friends and others, and they journeyed to Egypt in search of safety there: [Jer. 43:5-8].

But Jeremiah was no tourist!

He didn't admire the pyramids or the Sphinx *or* meet any mummies.

He couldn't see them!

He couldn't see them because his eyes were sooo(!) full of tears.

He was *terribly* upset about what the Babylonians had done to beloved Jerusalem.

He was *terribly* upset that the people - his countrymen - the "Jews" - hadn't listened to him - to God - to avert that *catastrophe*.

And so he sat down to write a poem - a really, *really* long poem called, *Lamentations*.

To "lament" something is to say how sad you are that it is gone from your life. And Jeremiah was very sad that Canaan, the "Promised Land" was gone. That its cities were 'lonely'; now empty. - the people had been taken away to Babylon.

Not all of them, of course.

But Jeremiah couldn't know that.

To him, it felt like the *whole* world had ended.

And sometimes we can feel like that too:

we can feel awfully unhappy.

We might look at our "condition" - at our "situation" - and think that nothing good can come of this.

But Jeremiah knew God was with him - even in Egypt.

That God was always listening and "lamenting" with him, still loving on him and talking to him. And still does today with and for us.

Let's pray:

Lord God, ..., in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

[Dismiss children.]

We're lacking a little *internal* context, this morning, for our *Luke* reading, so allow me to "fill in the blanks."

We're part way through a large teaching bloc - you might even call it a "lecture!" - and in the verses immediately preceding those we see, Jesus just told His disciples two things: that they *one*, have a responsibility to 'rebuke' the sins of others in the Church: this isn't a "space space," then. Christianity isn't a religion of "hear no evil, see no evil."

And, *two*, that, *nonetheless*, they should forgive those same sinners even if that means doing so 'seven times a day': [17:4].

That's a symbolic number, significant in the Bible, which means again and again without end.

And thus the Apostles respond, we see, saying - essentially: "woah, woah, woah. What now? That is a *huge* thing for you to ask of us. If that's what following you involves, well you're just going to have to 'increase our faith!'"

They expected, in other words - and this phrase may sound a little familiar - a quid pro quo. [n.1]

Just look at that sentence - 'increase our faith' - in the first line of today's gospel

extract.

Notice that exclamation mark.

Notice the phrase's brevity; its abruptness.

Notice the lack of courtesy.

Notice the absence of that special word, "please."

And notice who they were speaking to - the person who replies: that is, 'The Lord'.

Is that how one should speak to "*the Lord*?"

The "Lord of lords," in fact.

Where's the deference?

The respect?

And yet, before we get too carried away critiquing - or "rebuking" - *their* mistake, isn't that also how, so often we also approach Him?

Not explicitly, perhaps; but implicitly: with a similar mindset -

so much of the time we speak to Jesus or His father only when we *want* something out of them: a favor, where the underlying presumption is that, whatever it is, we've a *right* to it.

The rest of the time we largely ignore them both.

Sideline speaking to them to Sundays only.

Our prayers, if we're praying at all during the rest of the week, aren't a "basket" of "Wow, I'm so thankfuls."

We don't approach them with long lists of blessings we know we don't deserve, gushing our gratitude.

No, we usually only go to them because we're after... *more*; more than we already enjoy.

We treat God like He's a vending machine: we want to merely make a selection, punch a few buttons, and *voila!* Have whatever just "land in our laps."

And when that doesn't happen - as often it doesn't(!), we become resentful and distant from Him.

(We can treat our families and politicians - our "community" - in a similar way too.)

And this all stems from a troubling; a *sinful* attitude of *entitlement*; an idea - no where justified or really examined - that, "I am just *owed* this thing."

"That it is *due* me."

But hold on! - *Where* did we get such a notion? - That goods and services should just "*flow*" to us.

That we don't need to *earn* them?

What made the *Apostles* think they could just demand for the Christ - the Creator incarnate - to 'increase' their trust in Him?

Wasn't He already proving Himself?

His very presence with them - in human flesh, was *abundant* evidence that His claims - His claim of loving us, of seeking to mend our brokenness - were not mere

empty words.

And instead of reciprocating appropriately - with a "Yes sir. Right away, sir," they ask even more of Him.

Like Jesus hasn't provided enough already?

And you know, they have all this backwards anyway:

and He calls them out for this topsy-turvy attitude.

He calls them - He describes them as His slaves, and, by extension, that is true for us too: *we're* His slaves - and we don't like to hear that!

Do we?

He says that we are His slaves and slaves should remember their place within the hierarchy - another "dirty" word.

And slaves, in the ancient world, didn't get to demand from their master anything: their lives "hung by a thread" - a "thread" consisting of their owner's good will toward them.

And our position as human *creatures* is no different vis-a-vis the one who, at this very moment, is holding existence together.

Who allows my next breath and thought.

Who died to set me free.

And so, irrespective of my circumstances - especially when they are bleak - it'll take faith to respond as I truly should.

Lots of faith to keep things in their right and proper perspective.

So, Jesus talks about having enough of it to move a 'mulberry tree'.

Matthew and *Mark* remember it being a 'mountain': [Mt. 21:21, Mk. 11:23]; but they might have had a different occasion in mind entirely.

He doesn't mean this literally!

After all, to *believe* something doesn't *make* it true.

And to believe something fantastical no more so.

Indeed, perhaps less.

I might *believe*, for instance, that I'm a millionaire;

but if I spend my money as if this were the case - in reality, I'd very quickly find myself in financial trouble, right?

Believing something doesn't *make* it (become) true.

Thus, believing that I might cause a mulberry tree - or a mountain - to *rip* itself out of the earth, levitate into the air for a moment, and then suddenly fly off like a jet-fighter to splash down into the sea, hundreds of miles away, actually would have no effect of something of the kind occurring.

Belief is a power only when we *act* on it.

When we decide to modify our behavior in consequence.

But by itself it is of little significance.

And having more or less doesn't make any difference to the world around me if it stays up here in my head, and isn't translated into muscle movement and speech-acts.

Now, the Holy Spirit - *that* is a power that could perform the kind of miracle Jesus describes.

Indeed, to do something like that would be easy! - for Him.

After all, as one of the persons of a trinitarian God, He directly participated in creating the universe - all of its billions of stars and galaxies.

Compared to that effort, dispensing with a single shrub would be nothing at all.

And we have Him inside us - as we do from at least our baptisms.

There's nothing more to add, really.

Except to say that we should embrace, then, what has already been provided: which is a great deal more than any one of us needs to lead the sort of lives that God intends for us.

Let's take a moment to reflect.

Footnotes:

1. See, for example: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/04/us/politics/quid-pro-quo-trump.html>