

**Opening Prayer**

**Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.**

**Jeremiah 2:4-13**

<sup>4</sup> Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. <sup>5</sup> Thus says the LORD: What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves? <sup>6</sup> They did not say, "Where is the LORD who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that no one passes through, where no one lives?" <sup>7</sup> I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination. <sup>8</sup> The priests did not say, "Where is the LORD?" Those who handle the law did not know me; the rulers transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after things that do not profit. <sup>9</sup> Therefore once more I accuse you, says the LORD, and I accuse your children's children. <sup>10</sup> Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look, send to Kedar and examine with care; see if there has ever been such a thing. <sup>11</sup> Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for something that does not profit. <sup>12</sup> Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate, says the LORD, <sup>13</sup> for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.

**Commentary**

From Chapter 1, we know that Jeremiah was either born or began his ministry in 627 BC. During his life, Babylonia succeeded Assyria as the dominant power in the Middle East. He was a witness to the return to worship of the Lord (instituted by the Judean king Josiah), and then (after Josiah's death in battle in 609), the return of many of the Hebrew people to paganism. God called him to be a prophet to Judah and surrounding nations, in the midst of these political and religious convulsions.

God here presents a lawsuit against Israel, through Jeremiah. God has a very strong case! As there were witnesses to the making of the Sinai covenant, so there are witnesses now ("heavens", v. 12). For generations ("ancestors", v. 5) Israel, the northern kingdom, ("house of Jacob", v. 4) has worshipped "worthless things" (v. 5), i.e. idols. The people have forgotten the very nature of Israel's religion, and no longer recognize God's gifts to them, through his intervention in earthly affairs through the centuries. The leaders are at fault: "priests", "rulers"

and “prophets”. Priests have become specialists in the laws on sacrifices; they no longer know anything of God, so they worship nothingness. The *court* and *temple* prophets - as against “vocational” prophets like Jeremiah, who were called by God into the thankless role of a prophet - bring prophecies which are false. Israel’s prophets utter messages from other gods (“by Baal”) and not from God! God asks (vv. 10-11): throughout the whole known world, from “Cyprus” in the west to the nomadic tribe of “Kedar” in the east, has any nation ever forsaken their gods for none at all? That’s what Judah has done! God is “the fountain of living water”: in Palestine, a country where water was (and is) scarce, people dug “cisterns” to collect winter rains for use in the dry season. Israel’s cisterns are “cracked”: worship of idols (foreign gods) is no investment for the future.

### **Reflection**

How do we, as individuals or as a community, depend on “cracked cisterns” instead of on God’s fount of living water? What would you say are the “cracked cisterns” of 201 – pop culture? Politics? Consumerism?

### **Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16**

<sup>1</sup> Let mutual love continue. <sup>2</sup> Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. <sup>3</sup> Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. <sup>4</sup> Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. <sup>5</sup> Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” <sup>6</sup> So we can say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?”

<sup>7</sup> Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. <sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

<sup>15</sup> Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. <sup>16</sup> Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

### **Commentary**

The identity of the author of the Letter to the Hebrews is unknown; church father Origen, c. 200, said that “only God knows” who wrote Hebrews. This book presents an elaborate analysis, arguing for the absolute supremacy of Christ as revealer and mediator of God’s grace. Jesus Christ is a “great high priest” whose sacrifice – unlike the sacrifices of Israel’s temple priests – is perfect and sufficient forever. The author also encourages the young Christian communities to stand fast against persecution and attack.

With this reading, the lectionary concludes four weeks in the Letter to the Hebrews. The author, here at the end of his letter, offers guidance regarding the shared life in the Christian

community. He expects members to “show hospitality to strangers”, i.e. to Christians from other churches. (Inns existed, but because they were frequented by prostitutes and bandits, travellers generally stayed with other Christians.) Perhaps you will entertain “angels”, as Abraham did at Mamre: he looked after three men who were either angels - or God himself. Marital infidelity and greed can corrupt community life, so should be avoided. God will look after your needs. (The quotation is God’s words to Joshua, after Moses died.) Emulate the way of life of your past “leaders” (v. 7), now deceased, for the “word of God” they spoke continues. Amid constant change, Jesus Christ is always the same (v. 8) Offer the “sacrifice” (v. 15) of thanksgiving, made in faith, and lead an exemplary life of faith so that your present “leaders” (v. 17) can be proud of you.

## **Reflection**

The closing exhortations in Chapter 13, including the demand to practice “radical hospitality” towards strangers, to visit those in prison, to observe proper boundaries in marriage and in the stewardship of material resources all flow out of a sense that the world is a very different place, now that Christ is resurrected. To which of those disciplines – hospitality, pastoral care, or stewardship – do you feel most called?

## **Luke 14:1, 7-14**

<sup>1</sup> On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. <sup>7</sup> When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. <sup>8</sup> “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; <sup>9</sup> and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. <sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. <sup>11</sup> For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

<sup>12</sup> He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. <sup>13</sup> But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. <sup>14</sup> And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

## **Commentary**

The author of the third Gospel, traditionally Luke the physician who accompanied Paul on some of his missionary journeys, emphasizes God's love for the poor, the disadvantaged, minorities, outcasts, sinners and lepers. Women also hold a prominent place in Luke’s Gospel.

The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the godly at the end of time and were keen to be among those chosen as faithful, so they “were watching (Jesus) closely”. Jesus’ host is a

prominent *Pharisee* (v. 1); we recognize that the “parable” (v. 7) is about membership in the Kingdom. The Greek word rendered as “guests” means *apparently chosen* or *see themselves as chosen*. The gathering of God’s elect at the end of time was commonly depicted as a “wedding banquet” (v. 8). There the host is God. The “punch line” is in verse 11: Jesus is drawing a conclusion about the kingdom of God, where attendance depends on God’s invitation. God will not be fooled by self-promotion! Jewish and Greco-Roman societies both spurned the “poor” (v. 13) and the disabled. Documents from religious communities of Jesus’ day say that “those people” will be excluded from the banquet, but Jesus says instead, *share with them!* (v. 13). Giving to those unable to “repay” (v. 14) will admit one to the kingdom.

## Reflection

If you were inviting people to the banquet table of God, who would get the best seats?

## Responsive Psalter

From Psalm 81:1, 10-16

- <sup>1</sup> Sing aloud to God our strength;  
shout for joy to the God of Jacob.
- <sup>10</sup> I am the LORD your God,  
who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.  
Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.
- <sup>11</sup> “But my people did not listen to my voice;  
Israel would not submit to me.
- <sup>12</sup> So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,  
to follow their own counsels.
- <sup>13</sup> O that my people would listen to me,  
that Israel would walk in my ways!
- <sup>14</sup> Then I would quickly subdue their enemies,  
and turn my hand against their foes.
- <sup>15</sup> Those who hate the LORD would cringe before him,  
and their doom would last forever.
- <sup>16</sup> I would feed you with the finest of the wheat,  
and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”

## Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**