

**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 32:1-3a, 6-15**

<sup>32:1</sup> The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar. <sup>2</sup> At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, <sup>3a</sup> where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him.

<sup>32:6</sup> Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>7</sup> Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours." <sup>8</sup> Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the LORD, and said to me, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself." Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD. <sup>9</sup> And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. <sup>10</sup> I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. <sup>11</sup> Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; <sup>12</sup> and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. <sup>13</sup> In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, <sup>14</sup> Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. <sup>15</sup> For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

**Commentary**

King Nebuchadnezzar II ("Nebuchadrezzar") of Babylon made "Zedekiah" the puppet ruler of Judah in 597 BC, so it is now 587. Most of the preceding poems are about the restoration of Israel; here Judah's future is foretold. Chapters 37-38 give us the historical background. In 588, Egyptian armies arrived, temporarily lifting the siege of Jerusalem, and leading the people to think that deliverance had come, but Jeremiah warned that optimism was unwarranted. He set out to go from Jerusalem to "Anathoth", (v. 7, his home village), but was arrested and imprisoned on suspicion of desertion. Zedekiah has lightened his sentence to house arrest ("confined in the court ...", v. 2). When the Egyptians departed, the Babylonians again besieged Jerusalem. Anathoth is now in Babylonian hands.

Now God tells Jeremiah that his cousin "Hanamel" (v. 7) will come to him, asking him to buy his field. (To keep land in a family, the Law prescribed that if a man needed to sell any, a relative had

the “right”, and obligation, to buy it.) That Hanamel asks him, convinces Jeremiah that “the word” (v. 8) is truly from God. Vv. 9-14 are the most complete record of a business transaction in the Bible. Similar deeds – a sealed and an “open copy” (v. 11) for easy reference – have been found in “earthenware jar[s]” (v. 14) in Egypt. Note the emphasis on “witnesses” (vv. 10, 12). This is the first mention of “Baruch” (v. 12), later Jeremiah’s friend and the scribe who wrote down his words. That the transaction is conducted as though Judah is free, that the “deeds” (v. 14) are safeguarded to “last for a long time” – and God’s words to the prophet – foretell that Judah does have a future, a time when people will again be free to buy and sell property in the land.

### **Reflection**

This reading offers us some interesting historical information about life in the ancient Near East: the signing of contracts and deeds. Does it seem odd that the Lord – through his prophet, Jeremiah – is so interested in a real estate transaction? The deed in the earthenware jar is important for what it represents: hope. Have you ever planted a tree whose fruit you know you will not live to taste?

### **1 Timothy 6:6-19**

<sup>6,6</sup> Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; <sup>7</sup> for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; <sup>8</sup> but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. <sup>9</sup> But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. <sup>11</sup> But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. <sup>12</sup> Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. <sup>13</sup> In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you <sup>14</sup> to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>15</sup> which he will bring about at the right time--he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. <sup>16</sup> It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. <sup>17</sup> As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. <sup>18</sup> They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, <sup>19</sup> thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

### **Commentary**

Our passage is the concluding section of the book. In vv. 3-5, the author has again warned against those who teach other than the body of faith passed down from Jesus and the apostles. He has charged these teachers with monetary gain for teaching falsehoods. Now, writing in Paul’s name, he counters that there is “great [spiritual] gain” (v. 6) in teaching the truth; those who do so are content with enough to pay for necessities (“food and clothing”, v. 8). But false teachers “who want to be rich” (v. 9) succumb to “senseless and harmful desires”, and lead people astray from godliness. The true church leader is very different.

Now he addresses Timothy, a “man of God” (v. 11), spiritual leader of the Church. He sees Christian life as a “fight” (v. 12). Timothy “made the good confession” that Jesus is Lord at his baptism; Jesus made his “confession” (v. 13) of fidelity in his conduct when facing death. Timothy is to keep “the commandment” (v. 14, Christ’s orders) until he returns at the end of the era, “at the right time” (v. 15), i.e. when God chooses. “Immortality” (v. 16) is an attribute of God. We cannot see him, but Jesus can and will reveal him. The author now speaks to affluent members of the community (v. 17). They should not set store in money, but rather in God, for it is God’s gift. It is to be used in a godly way, for “good works” (v. 18) and sharing with the needy, for through such generosity they will attain eternal life, “life that really is life” (v. 19).

### Reflection

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” – verse 10. Have you ever seen or heard this verse misquoted? What is the difference between “the love of money” as the root of “all kinds of evil,” and just plain “money” as that root? How should church leaders – you! – keep yourselves from “the love of money”?

### Luke 16:19-31

<sup>16:19</sup> "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup> And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup> who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. <sup>22</sup> The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup> In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. <sup>24</sup> He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' <sup>25</sup> But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. <sup>26</sup> Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' <sup>27</sup> He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house-- <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers--that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' <sup>29</sup> Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' <sup>30</sup> He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' <sup>31</sup> He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

### Commentary

Luke has described Pharisees as “lovers of money” (v. 14). Now Jesus expands on a tale from popular folklore to tell a parable. Only the rich could afford cloth dyed with “purple” (v. 19), and “fine linen” undergarments from Egypt. No moral judgements are made directly on the “rich man” and Lazarus (v. 20), but they are implied: v. 30 infers that the rich man, and his brothers, have not repented of their sins, but “Lazarus” (v. 21) means *God helps*, so he has. (“Dogs” ate the bread guests had used to wipe their plates and hands and then tossed under the table.) Vv. 22-23 tell of the reversal of fates after death, in contemporary Jewish terms: Lazarus goes to a place of bliss, beside “Abraham”, the founder of God’s covenant people, but the rich man roasts in “Hades” (v. 23, the Greek name for Sheol, the abode of the dead). Recall that Abraham was wealthy, and obedient to God’s will.

In v. 27-28, the rich man changes tactics: upon learning that the gulf between him and Lazarus cannot be bridged ("a great chasm has been fixed", v. 26), he asks that his brothers be saved from the same fate. Abraham's answer (v. 29) amounts to: God reveals himself and his will in the Old Testament, so the "brothers" (v. 28) have been warned of the fate that awaits them. The Law required landowners, God's tenants, to share with the needy.

In v. 31, in speaking of "someone rises from the dead", Jesus is referring to his resurrection. Even then, "they" will not "repent" (v. 30). Like Lazarus, those whom God helps will come into his presence but, like the rich man, the ungodly will suffer irreversible punishment. God has revealed his will through "Moses and the prophets" (v. 29); those who neglect it will suffer after death. In this case, Jesus overturns conventional Jewish wisdom: it said that wealth was a sign of being blessed by God; if one was poor, one must be ungodly.

### Reflection

What is your response to what seems like a harsh answer from Father Abraham to the rich man's request? Is this divine justice? Fair or unfair – and why?

### Responsive Psalter

From Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16

<sup>91:1</sup> You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,

**<sup>2</sup> will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."**

<sup>3</sup> For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence;

**<sup>4</sup> he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.**

<sup>5</sup> You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day,

**<sup>6</sup> or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday.**

<sup>91:14</sup> Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.

**<sup>15</sup> When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them.**

<sup>16</sup> With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

### 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.**