

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
September 18, 2022
"No Balm in Gilead"



**God asks Jeremiah,
"Is there no cure for our people?"**

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***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:** Based on Jeremiah 8
One: God welcomes those whose hearts are sick.
God's invitation comes to people whose joy is gone.
Many: Why is the health of God's people not

restored? Why must we weep day and night for those we have lost?

Divine Healer, you delight in our wholeness.

You are the balm for our heavy-laden hearts and souls.

There is a balm in Gilead. There is a physician who heals. Jesus Christ is our mediator, healer, and savior.

We bring all our pain and unresolved anger.

We come in all our confusion to seek answers.

Bring all your urgent prayers and honest laments.

God is eager to offer salvation and open us to truth.

We cry out to God for deliverance from our sin.

We cry out for relief from our suffering.

***INVOCATION:** Into this holy temple, we have come, gracious God. This is not our church but yours. We cannot claim our world; it is a trust from your hand. Our lives, our health, our length of days call forth our stewardship. We are managers, not owners, so we come to you now to give account and seek your further commands. Help us, O God of our salvation. Amen.

***CALL TO CONFESSION:** "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and all are not saved." We resist the great physician, for healing requires change and we have not been ready to give up our favorite vices.

We have not been eager to do things God's way. Join me as we seek forgiveness.

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

O God, we have not managed well the wealth of the earth, which is our trust from you. We have modified your commands to suit our own egos and desires. We have wasted resources while hoarding for our own use what is meant for all to enjoy. Our concerns are narrow and our compassion is weak. We are restless and unfulfilled for we have not tried your ways. Forgive us, we pray, and lead us into your new day. Silence

***ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:** Let the confusion and despair of your former ways melt into trust in a God who cares. Let go of dishonesty and false riches to accept the wealth of knowing God and responding in faithfulness. God's gift to us is a quiet and peaceable life, full of dignity and godliness. Such acceptance and inner peace and enliven our active care for others and our sharing in the joy of service. Amen.

FIRST TESTAMENT READING: Jeremiah 8:18-9:1

¹⁸ No healing, only grief; my heart is broken.^[a]

¹⁹ Listen to the weeping of my people all across the land: "Isn't the LORD in Zion? Is her king no longer there?" Why then did they anger me with their images, with pointless foreign gods?

²⁰ "The harvest is past the summer has ended, yet we aren't saved."

²¹ Because my people are crushed I am crushed; darkness and despair overwhelm me.

What to do with God's people

²² Is there no balm in Gilead?

Is there no physician there?

Why then have my people not been restored to health?

9 If only my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears,

I would weep day and night for the wounds of my people.

***GOSPEL READING: Luke 16:1-13**

Faithfulness with money

16 Jesus also said to the disciples, "A certain rich man heard that his household manager was wasting his estate. ² He called the manager in and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give me a report of your administration because you can no longer serve as my manager.'

³ "The household manager said to himself, what will I do now that my master is firing me as his manager? I'm not strong enough to dig and too proud to beg. ⁴ I know what I'll do so that, when I am removed from my management position, people will welcome me into their houses.

⁵“One by one, the manager sent for each person who owed his master money. He said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶ He said, ‘Nine hundred gallons of olive oil.’^[a] The manager said to him, ‘Take your contract, sit down quickly, and write four hundred fifty gallons.’ ⁷ Then the manager said to another, ‘How much do you owe?’ He said, ‘One thousand bushels of wheat.’^[b] He said, ‘Take your contract and write eight hundred.’

⁸“The master commended the dishonest manager because he acted cleverly. People who belong to this world are more clever in dealing with their peers than are people who belong to the light. ⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to make friends for yourselves so that when it’s gone, you will be welcomed into the eternal homes.

¹⁰ “Whoever is faithful with little is also faithful with much, and the one who is dishonest with little is also dishonest with much. ¹¹ If you haven’t been faithful with worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹² If you haven’t been faithful with someone else’s property, who will give you your own? ¹³ No household servant can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

***GOSPEL RESPONSE:** May these ancient words speak to us anew. **Thanks be to God. Amen.**

MESSAGE: “You Can’t Serve Two Masters”

This is a difficult parable to interpret. I think it ruffles our sense of fairness. Why would Jesus have the master commend the servant for embellishment? We’ll get to that in a few moments. First, we need to look at the passage in the whole.

First of all, Luke, the author of this Gospel, has devoted the whole chapter 16 to teachings about possessions. As we have seen in chapter 12, this is a subject of primary concern to Luke, not only in his record of Jesus’ teaching, but as early as the preaching of John the Baptist in Chapter 13, and as late as the church subsequent to Jesus in Acts 2, also written by Luke.

The discussion in Luke 16 consists of two parts, verses 1-13 and 14-31, which we’ll hear next week. Each part of this message is controlled by a parable, and each parable begins with “There was a rich man.” Both of these parables are found in Luke alone. In the first part, only verse 13 has a parallel elsewhere in Matthew who places this saying in the Sermon on the Mount. (6:24 “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”)

Vital to the interpretation of parables is the figuring out the limits of the parable itself; that is, exactly where does the parable begin and end? Obviously, such a task is primary when one is seeking to isolate a story as Jesus told it, but it is equally basic to discovering to what use or for what purpose a particular writer preserves the Jesus tradition or the basic teaching. So today we not only have an enigma, but we also have a mystery. The difficulty of this parable is clearly seen from the fact that Luke attaches no fewer than four different lessons to it. In verse 8 . . .

(⁸ “The master commended the dishonest manager because he acted cleverly. People who belong to this world are more clever in dealing with their peers than are people who belong to the light.”)

the lesson is that the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. That means that, if only Christians were as eager and ingenious in their attempt to attain goodness as those with more worldly concerns are in their attempts to attain money and comfort, they would be much better people. If only people would give as much attention to the things which concern their souls as they do to the things which concern their

business, they would be much better human beings. Perhaps you know someone like that.

2. In verse 9 the lesson is that material possessions should be used to cement friendships wherein the real and permanent value of life lies. This statement might need some further explanation. A Rabbi once said “the rich help the poor in this world, but the poor help the rich in the world to come.” When commenting on the story of the rich food who build bigger barns to store his goods, Ambrose said, “The bosoms of the poor, the houses of widows, the mouths of children are the barns which last forever.” It was a Jewish belief that true wealth would consist not in what people keep, but in what they give away.

3. In verses 10 and 11 the lesson is that the way of fulfilling a small task is the best proof of fitness or unfitness to be entrusted with a bigger task. This applies to not only earthly things, but also eternity. Jesus said “Upon earth you are in charge of things which are not really yours. You cannot take them with you when you die. They are only lent to you. You are only a steward over them. They cannot, in the nature of things, be permanently yours. On the other hand, in heaven you will get what is really and eternally yours. And what you get in heaven depends on how you use the things of earth. What you will be

given as your very own will depend on how you use the things of which you are only a steward.”

4. In verse 13 we hear the rule that no slave can serve two masters. In our world, many people are multi tasked and have more than one job to survive. But a servant in our parable had no time which was his own. So, serving God can never be a part-time or a spare-time job. If we serve God by caring for our family or others, we have no time or energy to give anywhere else. Remember “all for Jesus.”

Let us review; lesson one – We should give our attention to learning how and acting as good people. Lesson two – Give away more than you keep. Lesson three – do your best no matter how small the task is. It’s important to your life in eternity. Lesson four – choose wisely who you should serve.

BTW getting back to our original concern about the servant cutting the debts of others, most scholars believe that he did this to eliminate his commission. That’s why he was commended. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with a time for silent personal prayer.

Patient and ever-forgiving God, we thank you for healing us from our self-centered, judgmental hearts. You give us lessons in your words. You give us a chance to listen and go forth as servants to others in your divine name. Guide us in our endeavors.

Uphold all who teach in your name, that truly expounding the wisdom of Christ they may persuade the uncommitted to declare their faith in our Lord Jesus, and learn to trust and follow him who is the Light of the world and our guide to God.

Be favorable to our land, O God, despite our enmities and strife, our greed and immorality. For the sake of the humble and prayerful in every land, protect them from wars and oppression.

Bless all who are vested with power that they may have prudence and courage and patience. Grant prosperity to the whole world population that suitable employment and reasonable living stands may be enjoyed everywhere and by everyone. Compassionate God, in Christ you have known the endurance of pain, and can sympathize with the suffering. Help them to rise above fear, and to look with hope for your healing with the support and care of doctors and nurses. Bless all who establish and maintain nursing homes and hospitals, and all who organize and serve in home nursing services. Save them from greed those who organize health insurance plans that the best of care may be available for rich and poor alike.

Be with our friends and family who are sick, and when life and health are no longer possible, bring them peace. We pray for all those on our prayer list

and all those who care for them. Service to others is our goal. Help us see the needs of others to share what we have, even if it's just our time.

We humbly pray all these things in the name of your Son. . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY: As managers for God of the world's resources, we share the hurt of those who are poor, sick, and in mourning. Our wealth is meant to bring good news to them in Jesus' name. We invest in the church's outreach, that our money may serve God, not trap us in idolatry.

***OFFERTORY PRAYER:**

We give, loving God, because of your generosity to us. We share because this is your will for us. In faithfulness to your call, we seek to manage the resources you provide for the greatest benefit to humankind. May they bring a bit closer an

awareness of your intentions for us and your rule among us. We worship and serve you with all we have. Amen.

***BENEDICTION:**

As you enter into everyday life again, let the balm you received be the balm that you gladly share with others. Go forth in the wholeness of God's steadfast love. Amen.

PRAYER LIST: Carol Bulva, Bob Puckett, Janice Lohman, Urban Baum, David Seneczyn, Warren Neff, Carol White, Cheri Schutzenhofer, Theo Mally, Jane Riess, Betty Massey, Gary Whitkas, Sandy Fort, Ron Bopp, Becky Ballard, Peggy and her family (friends of Judy Schmitt), Rosemary Williams, Mary (friends of Nancy's), Jackie Canterbury.