

Greater Hartford Conference, New England Synod, ELCA

Pericope Study for Sun 8/14/11 – Lectionary (Ordinary Time) 20A / Proper 15A / Pentecost + 9 (13)

Presented Tuesday August 9, 2011 by Richard Burgess

Introduction

This is a pericope study presented in an effort to assist in studying the lectionary as part of sermon preparation. My intention is to provide some information and direction in your attempt to hear God's Word and sense the Spirit's movement. Not everything here is intended or suitable for use with your parishioners. Similarly, while I am responsible for the content, it does not necessarily directly reflect my opinions or theology, though it might.

Ecumenical Lectionary Concerns: (The ELW (Evangelical Lutheran Book of Worship) lessons are used for this pericope study, though I have also included the semi-continuous OT lesson.)

	Lesson I	Psalm	Lesson II	Gospel
RCL (semi-continuous OT)	Gen 45.1-15	Ps 133	Rom 11.1-2a, 29-32	Mt 15. (10-20), 21-28
ELW (OT & Gospel linked)	Is 56.1, 6-8	Ps 67	Rom 11.1-2a, 29-32	Mt 15. (10-20), 21-28
LBW (Pentecost + 13)	Is 56.1, 6-8	Ps 67	Rom 11.13-15, 29-32	Mt 15.21-28
BCP (Proper 15)	Is 56,1(2-5)6-7	Ps 67	Rom 11.13-15, 29-32	Mt 15.21-28
Catholic	Is 56.1, 6-7	Ps 67	Rom 11.13-15, 29-32	Mt 15.21-28

Collect / POD (LBW)

Almighty and Ever-living God, you have given great and precious promises to those who believe. Grant us the perfect faith which overcomes all doubts, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect / POD (ELW)

God of all peoples, your arms reach out to embrace all those who call upon you. Teach us as disciples of your Son to love the world with compassion and constancy, that your name may be known throughout the earth, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Note: All four lessons this week deal with varying forms of in versus out and Jew versus Gentile. Is this an opportunity for ecumenical or interfaith discussion? I am currently involved in plans with an interfaith group for observing the tenth anniversary of 9/1/1, so these are very much part of my thinking in this month preceding the anniversary.

First Reading: Isaiah 56:1, 6-8 (NRSV)

^{56.1}Thus says the LORD:

Maintain justice, and do what is right,
for soon my salvation will come,
and my deliverance be revealed.

⁶And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,
and hold fast my covenant –

⁷these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer

for all peoples.
⁸Thus says the Lord GOD,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,
I will gather others to them
besides those already gathered.

Outline / Structure:

Is 56.1 Maintain justice, then you will receive YHWH's salvation / deliverance
Is 56.6-7 Foreigners who worship properly will have their worship accepted
Is 56.8 YHWH will gather outcasts in addition to those of Israel

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

- Is 56 Note that this is the beginning of Third Isaiah, ie, when the exiled Israelites come back and find it isn't as perfect as they'd hoped while in exile.
- Is 56.1-8 "*Maintain justice . . . I will gather others to them*: Third Isaiah begins with the same kind of openness exhibited in Second Isaiah. Here, foreigners and eunuchs who "maintain justice" (56.1), "keep my sabbaths" (56.4), and "hold fast my covenant" (55.6) are fully admitted to the community of God's people. To them is extended the "everlasting sign" promised forever to Israel (55.13). Biblical law had excluded eunuchs (males whose sexual organs had been removed) from the assembly (see Dt 23.1; Lev 21.18-20), but that prohibition is now surprisingly lifted. And foreigners are now assured of their welcome in God's house, "a house of prayer for all peoples" (56.7; see also Mk 11.17). Here, membership in God's people is a matter of commitment, not merely of heritage. During the exile, when temple worship was impossible, keeping the Sabbath had gained in importance as a mark of God's people (58.13-14)." (Lutheran Study Bible)
- Is 56.1 *right . . . deliverance*. These are the same Hebrew word "tsdqh. (The NIV translates it as "right" and "righteousness".) Compare "deliverance" and "righteousness".
- Is 56.1 What is god's *salvation* and/or *deliverance*? Is it in this world? After death? "Eternal"? What does it mean for your congregation in their context?
- Is 56.2-5 Why are 56.2-5 left out? Word play about eunuchs?
- Is 56.6-7 It would appear that non-Israelites have to obey the law to be accepted by YHWH. What does this mean in light of our Lutheran understanding of justification by grace through faith? How might this affect your preaching? Evangelism?
- Is 56.7b *for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples*. Jesus quotes this when he cleanses the temple in Mt 21:13 // Mk 11.17 // Lk 19.46, though the *all peoples* part is left out in Matthew and Luke.
- Is 56.8 *outcasts of Israel* Does this mean those Israelites who have been outcast, ie, exiled, to Babylon? Those who are returning from Babylon and are outcast from the Israelites who never left? Those Israelites outcast for other reasons or to / from other places? How might this reminder of *outcasts* encourage humility in the Israelites? Who does this correspond to today in our situations?

Second Reading: Gen 45.1-15 (NRSV)

^{45.1}Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send

everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ²And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

⁴Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. ¹⁰You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹I will provide for you there – since there are five more years of famine to come – so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.' ¹²And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. ¹³You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." ¹⁴Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Outline / Structure:

- Gen 45.1 Joseph clears the room
- Gen 45.2 Joseph weeps and tells his brothers who he is
- Gen 45.4-8 God sent Joseph to Egypt to save Joseph's family from famine
- Gen 45.9-13 Joseph asks his brothers to go back and tell their Father to bring the whole family to Egypt to be saved from the famine
- Gen 45.14-15 Conclusion: Joseph weeps and sends his brother on their way

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

Joseph: Is Joseph an Egyptian or an Israelite?

Gen 45.1 *Everyone . . . no one* Apparently "everyone" doesn't include Joseph's brothers. What is the significance of this? In what sense might the Egyptians count but not his brothers?

Gen 45.2, 14-15 *Wept* Why did Joseph weep? Are these weepings the same, or is there more than one kind of weeping going on here?

Gen 45.3 *Is my father still alive?* See Gen 44:18-34 for an exchange about Joseph's request to have Benjamin brought to Egypt and his brothers reluctance to comply.

Gen 45.4-8 Joseph tells his brothers they didn't sell him into Egypt for evil, but God sent him to Egypt *to preserve life*. Could there be some revisionist doctoring up of history here? Could this be a veiled reference to Israel's presence in Egypt and the subsequent Exodus experience?

Gen 45.4-8 The issue of slavery is alluded to here. How might listeners whose families or they themselves have been subject to slavery hear this? "Slavery" might mean any number of things: antebellum American slavery, European serfdom, POW's, victims of sex trafficking, victims of totalitarian regimes, addictions, being under water, etc. Does the slavery mentioned here discount the rest of the message in any way? Can the slavery experiences of your congregation be turned to advantage, a la Joseph's slavery, in experiencing this passage?

Gen 45.4-8 God sent Joseph to save his family from famine. What about the Egyptians? Were they collateral deliverance, so to speak?

Gen 45.7 *Remnant*. Who are modern day remnants? Do you have any in your congregations? Do we have any people or congregations in our conference / synod / denomination that are “remnants”? How does this play itself out? How do we as leaders need to participate in (or stay out of) this?

Gen 45.11 *so that you . . . will not come to poverty* Does slavery count as “poverty”? What do you do with YHWH / Joseph leading his people into survival and subsequent slavery in Egypt? Is this a “remnant” thing?

Gen 45.1-15 How does this passage relate to family (or other) conflicts in our communities? In our own families? What is the basis here of hope for forgiveness and reconciliation?

Gen 45.1-15 How do the themes of blame, forgiveness, alienation, and reconciliation play out in this text?

Gen 45.1-15 “Remembering Joseph, telling his story, means remembering that some family relationships are deeply troubled, even violent. Remembering Joseph means reminding ourselves that even in the most deeply troubled family that has experienced unimaginable rupture, that forgiveness and healing are possible. Remembering Joseph and telling his story through this lesson provides an opportunity to reflect on our stewardship, generosity and relationships with others, neighbors and strangers. And lastly, today's lesson with its focus on Joseph reminds us that our actions have consequences that we may not be able to foresee.” (Gaffney, Wil, “Working Preacher” for 2011)

Lesson II: Romans 11:1–2a, 29–32 (NRSV)

¹¹I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ²God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. . . . ²⁹for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. ³²For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

Outline / Structure:

Rom 11.1-2a God has not rejected God's “people”, ie, the Jews.
Rom 1.29 because God's calling and gifts are “irrevocable”, ie, permanent
Rom 1.30 Christians were disobedient and have now received mercy for that disobedience
Rom 1.31 Likewise, nonbelieving Jews are now disobedient and will receive mercy
Rom 1.32 For God wants to be merciful to all

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

Rom 11.2b-31 Why were 11.2b-31 left out? What could be gained by including them? Lost or obfuscated?

Rom 11.2a, (2b-28), 29 *God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew . . . for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.* The lectionary has been cut up to make this look like one sentence. Is this OK? Does anything need to be done with this?

Rom 11.29 This seems to say that once God has made a covenant, God is obligated to keep that covenant forever. Is it really that simple? Are there any exceptions?

Rom 11.30-31 Can you sort out the cause and effect here? The time sequences? Are these verses saying that Jews and Gentiles need each other?

Rom 11.31-32 "ultimately what drives Paul's thought is less his theism and the need to rationalise events to show God is in . . . but rather his notion of God as compassionate. . . . He has no idea how - it is "a mystery" - but he insists: all Israel will be saved (11:25-26). . . . Paul finds it hard to believe that God could ever write Israel off and he knows the answer is not really to say: well, Christian Jews only will be saved." (Loader, Bill, "First Thoughts")

Rom 11.32 What has God caused to happen and for what reason? Does this have significance for theodicy discussions? Universal salvation?

Gospel: Matthew 15:[10-20] 21-28 (NRSV)

¹⁰Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: ¹¹it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." ¹²Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?" ¹³He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. ¹⁴Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." ¹⁵But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." ¹⁶Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? ¹⁸But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

²¹Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²²Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." ²³But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." ²⁴He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." ²⁶He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Outline / Structure:

Mt 15.10-20	Things that defile
Mt 15.10	Jesus: called the crowd to him and said, Listen and understand:
Mt 15.11	What comes out of the mouth defiles, not what goes in.
Mt 15.12	Disciples: You offended the Pharisees!
Mt 15.13-14	Jesus: If they aren't from God, they'll be uprooted; leave them alone, they'll never last
Mt 15.15	Peter: Explain this to us (ie, I don't get it.)
Mt 15.16	Jesus: You (pl) still don't get it?
Mt 15.17	What goes in the mouth goes thru the alimentary canal and into the drain / sewer.
Mt 15.18	What comes out of the mouth comes from the heart (=mind) & makes real sewage!
Mt 15.19	Out of the heart come all kinds of evil and sin.
Mt 15.20	This makes one unclean, not not washing ones hands.
Mt 15.21-28	The Canaanite Woman's Faith
Mt 15.21	Jesus left Galilee and went to Phoenicia
Mt 15.22	Canaanite woman asks Jesus to exorcise her daughter
Mt 15.23a	Jesus ignores the woman
Mt 15.23b	Disciples: She's annoying us; send her away.

Mt 15.24 Jesus: Not my job. I was sent to the Jews, not your kind.
 Mt 15.25 The woman persists: "Lord, help me."
 Mt 15.26 Jesus: It wouldn't be right for me to give dogs like you the children's (Jews') food.
 Mt 15.27 Woman: But even the dogs get table scraps.
 Mt 15.28a Jesus: You have great faith! You get your request.
 Mt 15.28b The girl was healed instantly.

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

Mt 15.(10-20) 21-28 "Jesus teaches his disciples that true purity is a matter of the heart rather than outward religious observances. Almost immediately, this teaching is tested when a woman considered to be pagan and unclean approaches him for help." ("Sundays & Seasons" for 2011) How did Jesus do in the test of what came out of his mouth?

Mt 15.10-20 // Mk 7.14-23.

Mt 15.10-20 What are the merits of using verses 10-20 or not? Why was 15.21-28 chosen as the primary portion of the text?

Mt 15.11, 18, 20 *defile* / *koinow* "to render (ceremonially) unclean, defile, pollute". (Perschbacher, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*) Or, to make "common" (Latin: "vulgar"). Does something being common or ritually unclean make it evil or a sin?

Mt 15.20 *unwashed hands* This whole chapter got started when in Mt 15.2 the Pharisees and scribes complained that Jesus' disciples didn't wash their hands before eating.

Mt 15.21-28 // Mk 7.24-30.

Mt 15.21-28 Interesting Contextual Chiasm:

Mt 14.13-21 Feeding of 5000
 Mt 14.22-36 walking on water and healing people at Gennesaret
 (Mt 15.1-20) (tradition & `what is clean / unclean, ie, in / out)
 Mt 15.21-28 Jesus reluctantly feeds a dog and heals her daughter
 Mt 15.29-31 Jesus heals many people at the Sea of Galilee
 Mt 15.32-39 Feeding of 4000

Mt 15.21-28 "quite frankly, Jesus does not come off well in this encounter with the Canaanite woman. It is tempting to justify Jesus' unseemly behavior or pretend we did not see it. If we can resist this temptation to save Jesus, and us, from embarrassment, we might discover some new insights in the Gospel story of Jesus as Matthew tells it." (Salmon, Marilyn, "Working Preacher" for 2008)

Mt 15.21 *left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon* ie, from Galilee near the Sea of Galilee (Jewish territory) north northwest to Phoenicia (modern Lebanon; Gentile, and historically unfriendly, territory).

Mt 15.22, 28 Note that the woman asked for an exorcism (.22) and got a healing (.28). Is there a difference? Did she get what she wanted?

Mt 15.22-23 the woman's "pleas are matched by the shouts of the disciples, "get rid of her!" (in the original Greek their words are an alliterative and ironic echo of the woman's cry: *apolyson*). With dramatic effect the story sets before us a Jesus flanked by two competing choruses: on one side one lone creature crying "*kyrie*

eleison," and on the other a band of bullies shouting her down with their "*apolyson*."" (Boyce, James, "Working Preacher" for 2011)

Mt 15.23, 26 Jesus gives this woman quite a hard time. While he did grant her request in the end, was it right to make her go through all that hassle? What might have been Jesus' reasons for doing it?

Mt 15.24-27 Just exactly who are the "lost sheep of Israel" and the "the dogs"? Which are you today?

Mt 15.25, 27 Lord (incl masters' in .27b) / kyrie Did the woman mean "master" or "YHWH"?

Mt 15.26-27 See Mt 14.13-21; 15:32-39. There is clearly enough of the children's bread to share some with the dogs.

Mt 15.21-28 Does this woman win an argument with Jesus or pass a test given by him?

Mt 15.21-28 Who is obnoxiously demanding that you heal / serve them? Do you give them table scraps or the children's bread? How do you know when to give them something else or maybe even nothing at all?

Theological Themes and Threads	Is	Gen	Rom	Mt
Insiders & outsiders; Blame & forgiveness, alienation & reconciliation	X	X	X	X
Remnant (Genesis: Joseph; Romans: Jews)		X	X	
Healing / exorcism				X
Justice, righteousness linked to salvation, deliverance	X			
Persistence in prayer, petitioning God				X
Acceptable worship, offerings, sacrifices	X			

Suggested Sermon Titles*	Is	Gen	Rom	Mt
God, He's Not Just for Jews (Christians?) Anymore	X	X	X	X
In Is Out and Out Is In	X	X	X	X
Betrayal and Slavery as a Solution to Famine		X		
Even the dogs get table scraps				X
Are you a mangy cur?				X
We are saved because the Jews are saved. Or is it the other way around?			X	
Underdogs win with Jesus				X
The gifts of God are What!?			X	

*I do not necessarily advocate using these as titles for real sermons, but rather present them in the hope that you might stumble over them and fall on something useful. Enjoy.

Recommended Resources

Lectionary 20a / Proper 15A / Pentecost + 13

Woodard, Jenee, "The Text This Week"

(links to virtually all online mainline commentary, including ATLAS articles)

<http://www.textweek.com/>

"Sermon Brainwave"

(podcast periscope study with Luther Seminary professors)

http://www.workingpreacher.org/brainwave.aspx?podcast_id=199

Burgess, Richard "Pericope Study for Lectionary 20A" (this document)

http://web.me.com/richardmburgess/RMB/Home_files/lect%2020a%20Pericope%20Study%20-%2011809.pdf

Nelson, Dan "Text Studies"

(commentary on ELW lessons)

<http://sio.midco.net/danelson9/yeara/proper15a.htm>

Working Preacher

(commentary on all lessons, including semi-continuous OT)

<http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx>

Isaiah 56.1, 6-8 & Genesis 45.1-15

Klein, Ralph, "Old Testament Text Studies"

<http://fontes.lstc.edu/~rklein/Documents/pentecosta.htm#Pentecost9>

Romans 11.1-2a, 29-32

Loader, William, "First Thoughts on Year A *Epistle* Passages from the Lectionary"

<http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/AEpPentecost9.htm>

Matthew 15.10-28

Loader, Bill, "First Thoughts on Passages from Matthew in the Lectionary"

<http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MtPentecost9.htm>

Stoffregen, Brian, "Exegetical Notes"

(usually includes discussion on parish-related issues)

Guthrie, Suzanne, "The Edge of Enclosure"

(artsy, mystical meditations on the gospel each week)

<http://www.edgeofenclosure.org/proper15a.html>