

Pathways to Preaching

a publication of the Lutheran Study Centre at Sabah Theologi-

Knowing God

Background and Synopsis:

Jeremiah is bringing a prophetic word from God, criticizing King Jehoiakim's reign. Jehoiakim reigned from 609-598 B.C.E. after the death of his father, King Josiah. Josiah had instituted a number of reforms such as repairing the temple and discovering a book of the law. He then seeks the guidance of the prophet Huldah in interpreting and implementing the law. (see 2 Kings 22-23). The new king, in contrast, discards the reforms. Rather, he undertakes building himself a lavish new palace, using expensive wood such as cedar and attention-grabbing paint colors such as vermilion.

Written by:

*Rev. Dr. Eric Trozzo,
Director of the Lutheran
Study Centre at STS.*

Bible Text: Jeremiah 22:13-17 New International Version (NIV)

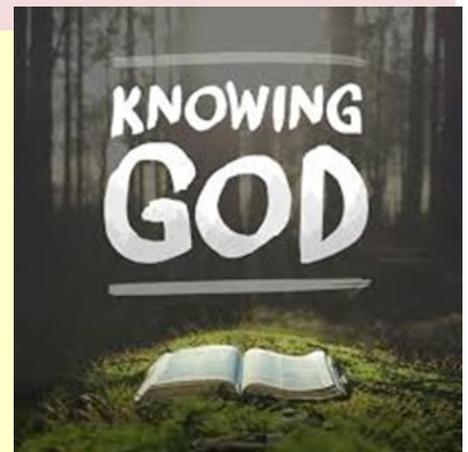
¹³“Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his own people work for nothing, not paying them for their labor.

¹⁴ He says, ‘I will build myself a great palace with spacious upper rooms.’ So he makes large windows in it, panels it with cedar and decorates it in red.

¹⁵“Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? Did not your father have food and drink? He did what was right and just, so all went well with him.

¹⁶ He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?” declares the LORD.

¹⁷“But your eyes and your heart are set only on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion.”



“Pathways to Preaching” is a newsletter provided by the Lutheran Study Centre.

<https://pathways2preaching.wordpress.com/> Email: LSC@stssabah.org

Postal Address: P.O. Box 11925, 88821 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Tel: 088 231579 FB: Lutheran Study Centre Lsc



-Knowing God

Law in the Text:

Jeremiah confronts Jehoiakim with the facts of what he has been doing. He is building a great mansion to glorify himself and he is doing it without giving fair wages. By doing this he is oppressing the poor and needy. He is focused on building up his own reputation and luxury at the expense of others. In other words, Jehoiakim is not merely building an unnecessary monument to his own arrogance. That would certainly in itself be distasteful at best. The bigger problem is he is using unjust practices to build it. He is reaping the rewards of someone else's labor and then refusing to pay the laborer. Jehoiakim is underpaying or refusing to pay the workers that are building the palace for him. Thus, he is making himself richer while making the day laborers poorer. For these practices, Jeremiah confronts Jehoiakim and tells him that God condemns these practices that are devastating to the lives of the poor people. As the king, he is at the top of society and he is using his position to take even more from those at the bottom.

Jeremiah puts the charges of the ways that Jehoiakim has sinned to the king by giving a direct account of what has been happening.

Jer. 22:13 says:

*“Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness,
and his upper rooms by injustice;
who makes his neighbours work for nothing,
and does not give them their wages;” (NRSV)*

To disregard the well-being of others, take what is rightfully theirs, and use it to build up oneself is to do violence to them, as it then says Jer. 22:17. Doing violence to another is not just a matter of physically assaulting them, in other words; when we drain the sense of purpose from their lives and grind them down with cruel indifference we do violence to them as well.

Gospel in the Text:

The gospel in this text is more implicit than explicit. The fact that God gives word to Jeremiah to confront the king indicates that God hears the cries and concerns of those who suffer. Though the unrighteous in this world continually act against those who are weaker than them, God does not abandon those struggling under the weight of this injustice. God hears their cries, and God cares about their suffering.

A persistent biblical message is that God speaks and acts on behalf of those put down by the people with power in this world. In this case, it is the workers who have been treated unfairly. The implied promise to them in this text is that God is with them.

“Pathways to Preaching” is a newsletter provided by the Lutheran Study Centre.

<https://pathways2preaching.wordpress.com/> Email: LSC@stsssabah.org

Postal Address: P.O. Box 11925, 88821 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Tel: 088 231579 FB: Lutheran Study Centre Lsc



Knowing God

Gospel in the Text: (Continued from page 2)

God speaks for them in situations where they are powerless to have a voice of their own. God is with them and God will not forget them. This is a powerful promise that God makes again and again in the Bible. In this text, God does not make this promise in words, but rather through actions. God sends Jeremiah to confront the king on behalf of those in need. This action demonstrates God's concern and solidarity with those whom the king has oppressed.

Transformation in the Text:

Jeremiah lifts up to Jehoiakim the example of his father, Josiah. Jeremiah contends,

“Did not your father eat and drink
and do justice and righteousness?
Then it was well with him.
He judged the cause of the poor and needy;
then it was well.
Is not this to know me?
says the Lord.” (Jer 22:15b-16, NRSV)

In other words, to know God is to do justice. When we come to know God, we learn that God is one who does not forget those in need. When we know that this is who God is, how can we not be moved to seek justice? How can we not reach out to make life better for those in need, treating them fairly? If we have the power to make a difference, then we are called to use that power to improve the lives of the poor and needy. This is the example that Jeremiah wants Jehoiakim to see in Josiah, and that we can see in this text as well.

The transformation that comes in this text is that when we know that God's nature is to remember those who are suffering and oppressed, then we will remember those people too. Quite often such people are invisible to us and forgotten by the world. But because we find in the bible that God remembers them, we are moved to remember them as well.

Songs and hymns:

511 - What does the Lord
require

519 - For the healing of the
Nations

504 - Make us worthy, Lord

-Knowing God

Theological Reflection:

To know God is to do justice. This is one of the works of the Holy Spirit in our lives, transforming us, I would argue. Part of the Good News of the biblical message is that God is one who will not forget the needy rather than one who will exalt the powerful. Coming to know this truth will change us. It causes us to not look to build monuments to our own arrogance, but rather to look to the needs of others. Knowing God to be the God of the weak leads us to action. Knowing God and acting justly are inseparable. In this passage we can see a movement from being condemned for our self-serving ways (being like Jehoiakim), to being confronted with the reality that God's concern is for those that the world considers unimportant (the prophetic words of Jeremiah), to being moved to act for justice (like Josiah). We can understand this process of moving from having our sin named by the law (Jehoiakim), to being confronted with God's faithfulness as gospel (through the words spoken through Jeremiah), to being led by the Holy Spirit to a new way of acting as transformation (Josiah). To be encountered by God is to be called to justice; to act for justice is a sign of knowing God. God and justice are inseparable.



Notice that when Jeremiah speaks of Josiah, he notes that Josiah ate and drank and sought justice and righteousness. We can see in this that God allows for enjoying things like eating and drinking; this is not a call to give up all pleasures in life. It is, however, an insistence that along with enjoying the blessings that we may have we must also seek justice for others. Yet I would add that such seeking justice is not a burden placed upon us. Rather, when we have a true experience of God we come to know that a concern for justice is central to who God is. Because this is who God is, we gladly join in with God's passion for those who are suffering. Thus, when we come to know God, we are transformed into people with a passion for caring for the needs of other people.



Knowing God

Theological Reflection: (Continued from page 4)

This does not preclude us from enjoying good things in life, but it does make us question the cost to other people that allows these good things to come to us. If other people are not paid enough to live on so that we can buy goods at the market for the cheapest price possible, for instance, then the cost to human life is not worth it. Being turned towards justice through an encounter with the Holy Spirit means that we cannot accept luxuries that cause violence to be done to those who make it possible for us to have those luxuries. Our passion for the well-being of others, when led by the Holy Spirit, is greater than our desire for unnecessary indulgences. Again, this is not so much a demand as it is a result of knowing that God who is passionate about caring for those who are vulnerable.

What Theologians Say:

“Although the kingdom [of God] must not be confused with the establishment of a just society, this does not mean that it is indifferent to this society. ... More profoundly, the proclamation of the kingdom reveals to society itself the aspiration for a just society and leads it to discover unsuspected dimensions and unexplored paths. The kingdom is realized in a society of fellowship and justice; and, in turn, this realization shines forth in promise and in hope of complete communion of us all with God.”

Contemporary Latin American theologian Gustavo Guitierrez, “Jesus and the Political World,” Essential Writings, 211.

“Pathways to Preaching” is a newsletter provided by the Lutheran Study Centre.

<https://pathways2preaching.wordpress.com/> Email: LSC@stssabah.org

Postal Address: P.O. Box 11925, 88821 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Tel: 088 231579 FB: Lutheran Study Centre Lsc

The Inclusive Message of the Gospel

The Inclusive Message of the Gospel

Synopsis:

An angel of the Lord sends Philip to a wilderness road south of Jerusalem to meet with an influential Ethiopian eunuch. Philip travels with the man, explaining the meaning of the Jewish scriptures in a way that introduces the man to the Good News about Jesus Christ. The man responds in faith and asks to be baptized. After Philip baptizes him, Philip is immediately sent on by the Holy Spirit to another region.



Written by:

*Rev. Dr. Eric Trozzo,
Director of the Lutheran Study
Centre at STS.*

Background:

The first seven chapters of Acts deal with the beginnings of the church in Jerusalem. While the story of Pentecost notes that people from throughout the region were present on that day, the action of the earliest church all takes place in Jerusalem. Yet after Stephen's arrest and stoning in chapter 7, chapter 8 begins with persecution in Jerusalem. Acts 8:1 tells us that all except the apostles were scattered throughout the Judean and Samaritan countryside.

Philip goes to the city of Samaria and begins to preach. It is worth remembering that Samaritans and Jews had a conflict over proper worship. Samaritans had a temple on Mount Gerazim that they used for worship rather than the temple in Jerusalem. The Jewish establishment rejected Samaritan worship as being improper, and Samaritans were reviled by many Jewish people as "half-Jewish" and "a mixed race." We can recall Jesus' dealings with Samaritans: in Luke 10 he tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, where the Samaritan character was one that the Jewish audience would have expected to be evil or uncaring but turned out to be the generous embodiment of the Kingdom of God; meanwhile, in John 4 Jesus meets a Samaritan woman and tells her that the day is coming when neither the temple on Mount Gerazim nor the temple in Jerusalem would be the place of true worship, but rather in the Holy Spirit worship will occur in spirit and truth (John 4:23). Thus, we see that Jesus was open to God's work beyond the boundaries with which his Jewish audience was comfortable, and now the early church is called to put that call into practice.

"Pathways to Preaching" is a newsletter provided by the Lutheran Study Centre.

<https://pathways2preaching.wordpress.com/> Email: LSC@stssabah.org

Postal Address: P.O. Box 11925, 88821 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Tel: 088 231579 FB: Lutheran Study Centre Lsc



The Inclusive Message of the Gospel

Law in the Text: (Continued from page 7)

Because of this practice of barring people, many who had a spiritual thirst for God were denied having it quenched. The eunuch, for instance, did not give up on finding God after going to Jerusalem. Instead, we find him reading the Suffering Servant texts from the prophet Isaiah (Isa 53:7-8). Yet, reading on his own, he has become confounded. He is unable to interpret what this passage means. In this, we can see that simply reading scripture alone is insufficient. We cannot come to knowledge of God, let alone faith, through our own efforts. Rather, the eunuch cries out, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” In response to this Philip is able to connect the Isaiah passage to Jesus and thus explain the Good News of Christ to him.

It is in this context of the eunuch encountering one obstacle to faith after another that we must hear his question, “What is to prevent me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36, NRSV) His efforts to come to know God on his own had been continually thwarted. The rigid application of God law as a means of keeping people out had managed to deny him access to God – and quite likely caused him personal embarrassment and shame as well. In other words, human efforts to reach God and human efforts to control God had both worked throughout his life to prevent him from experiencing acceptance by God.

Gospel in the Text:

The story of the early church was beginning to risk becoming a very narrowly defined community with rigid boundaries over who could be brought into divine grace. Yet before this could happen, the Holy Spirit began to move the church outward, especially through the leadership of Stephen and Philip. In particular, we see Philip being called to push the boundaries outward to include those excluded by temple practices. The boundaries of being deemed clean or unclean do not stop the movement of the Holy Spirit. The eunuch’s physical condition was no barrier to the Holy Spirit’s work, nor was his ethnic, cultural, or religious background. Similarly, the ethnic and religious background of the Samaritans was no impediment to God’s grace.

Yet it is not just that God’s grace reaches beyond the boundaries that humans prescribe for God’s action. Even more, through the Holy Spirit, disciples of Christ are sent beyond such boundaries. Philip is moved by the Holy Spirit to reach out to people that some in the church would have considered impermissible to include. Philip is called to welcome the stranger, the foreigner, and the ethnically/culturally/linguistically different people into experiencing God’s grace.

“Pathways to Preaching” is a newsletter provided by the Lutheran Study Centre.

<https://pathways2preaching.wordpress.com/> Email: LSC@stsssabah.org

Postal Address: P.O. Box 11925, 88821 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Tel: 088 231579 FB: Lutheran Study Centre Lsc



The Inclusive Message of the Gospel

Gospel in the Text: (Continued from page 8)

There is no demand included for adopting Jewish religious practices, for being circumcised, or making themselves acceptable by the religious standards of the church community at that time. Rather, Philip simply tells them about Jesus and invites them to faith. Philip's actions are called for and validated by the Holy Spirit. God's action of grace is one of acceptance. It crosses the boundaries that humanity thinks are uncrossable.

Part of God's grace, too, is the revealing of the truth of Christ. In particular, this is done through reading scripture with new eyes. Through knowing God through Christ and the Holy Spirit, new meaning can be found in the words of scripture. We cannot do this alone, however. We must be led: by the Holy Spirit, certainly, but also through being mentored by others. The faith and passion of others help to shape our understanding of the gospel, and then we can share our encounter with Christ to others to help them see the inclusive love of God.

Transformation in the Text:

As God reveals the inclusive love known in Christ, God also provides a means of affirming this faith. We see this several times in this passage. As the eunuch was struggling with his religious longing, the Holy Spirit brought Philip to him to guide him. God did not leave the eunuch alone in his spiritual struggling, but rather provided a means for him to hear the gospel. When he heard it and his faith was aroused, God then provided a means for solidifying his faith. As they traveled, they came to some water. The eunuch was thus given the tools needed to ask to be baptized. With the Holy Spirit providing such powerful signs of transformation and the realization of being acceptable before God, how could Philip stand in the way of God working? This baptism may not have fit the ecclesial rules of what was acceptable or proper, but the Holy Spirit was clearly at work in this encounter. The eunuch had gone from the spiritual struggle of being denied access to God's presence to the joy of being embraced by it through being baptized.

Philip, meanwhile, continues to find himself called to proclaim the gospel in new places. Now that he has experienced the ways that God breaks through boundaries, his understanding of his calling becomes clarified. He is to proclaim the Good News to all that he encounters. From Azotus all the way to Caesarea, he preaches in the towns in which he finds himself. It is worth noticing here that he does not return to Jerusalem, but rather he now knows that his calling is to move outward, continuing to expand the borders of where Christ has been proclaimed. He seems to settle into Caesarea, continuing to evangelize in the culturally mixed port city where Gentiles like Cornelius convert (see Acts 10:1, 21:8).

"Pathways to Preaching" is a newsletter provided by the Lutheran Study Centre.

<https://pathways2preaching.wordpress.com/> Email: LSC@stssabah.org

Postal Address: P.O. Box 11925, 88821 Koia Kinabalu, Sabah. Tel: 088 231579 FB: Lutheran Study Centre Lsc



The Inclusive Message of the Gospel

Theological Reflection:

Love crosses boundaries. This is one of the most fundamental of all Christian assertions. Obstacles that we think are impassable barriers are overcome by the love that comes from God. The incarnation shows us that God overcomes the boundary between divine and human. The resurrection shows us that death cannot stop the enduring power of love. Christian doctrine about atonement testifies that God's love comes to us despite the reality of our sin. Paul insists that human characteristics like race, gender, and social status cannot prevent the unity that we have in Christ. The love proclaimed by Christians crosses all boundaries.

Yet we are quick to forget this fundamental message. We quickly construct dividing lines. We see the differences that we find in humanity as being insurmountable obstacles. We see them as not only obstacles to our reaching out to others in love, but also as reasons that God's love does not apply to others. We may bask in the love that we know in Christ, but we want to be very careful about who that love is extended towards. After all, they might not deserve it! In our own minds, at least, we are able to judge who is worthy of love and who is not. And yet, time and again the scriptures show us that we cannot control where the Holy Spirit will go. The Holy Spirit respects no barriers against where love should go.

In the Acts text, the Holy Spirit moves the early church to cross the boundaries of their preconceptions. It moves them to overcome the differences between the Hellenic and Hebraic groups within the church. Further, it pushes them to share that God's love reaches to the Samaritans, the Ethiopians, and other people that do not fit the image that the disciples originally had of who could be acceptable before God and who could not. The Holy Spirit leads the church where the church would not choose to go; to declare God's love across borders that the church had considered fixed boundaries.

Songs and hymns:

#357 Great are Thy mercies,
Heavenly Father

317 Love Divine, All Loves
Excelling

502 We are your people

"Pathways to Preaching" is a newsletter provided by the Lutheran Study Centre.

<https://pathways2preaching.wordpress.com/> Email: LSC@stssabah.org

Postal Address: P.O. Box 11925, 88821 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Tel: 088 231579 FB: Lutheran Study Centre Lsc

The Inclusive Message of the Gospel

Theological Reflection: (Continued from page 10)

Thus we must ask ourselves, as well, what boundaries we assume cannot be crossed. Who is it that we consider to be outside the borders of God's love? Who is different, un-touchable, or unworthy of love, in our opinions? Might the Holy Spirit be moving us to reach out to them? Might the Holy Spirit be calling us to open our hearts even more in order to love the unlovable? Might we be called to mentor someone in faith who has felt rejected by the religious rules of our time? These are questions that we must continually ask ourselves in response to the love we have encountered in Christ.

What Theologians Say:

“Whom did Philip preach to the eunuch of the queen of the Ethiopians, returning from Jerusalem, and reading Esaias the prophet, when he and this man were alone together? Was it not He of whom the prophet spoke: ‘He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb dumb before the shearer, so He opened not the mouth?’ ‘But who shall declare His nativity? for His life shall be taken away from the earth.’ [Philip declared] that this was Jesus, and that the Scripture was fulfilled in Him; as did also the believing eunuch himself: and, immediately requesting to be baptized, he said, ‘I believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God.’ This man was also sent into the regions of Ethiopia, to preach what he had himself believed, that there was one God preached by the prophets, but that the Son of this [God] had already made [His] appearance in human nature, and had been led as a sheep to the slaughter; and all the other statements which the prophets made regarding Him.



Irenaeus of Lyon ,Against Heresies, XII:8 (late second century, around 180)

“Pathways to Preaching” is a newsletter provided by the Lutheran Study Centre.

<https://pathways2preaching.wordpress.com/> Email: LSC@stsssabah.org

Postal Address: P.O. Box 11925, 88821 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Tel: 088 231579 FB: Lutheran Study Centre Lsc