Stirrup(2023)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Today's reading for our Epistle is one of only ten lessons in our entire PB--including for unusual liturgies such as a Church Dedication--which do not come from the NT, and one of only TWO such Sunday lessons. The other Sunday OT lesson is for the Second Sunday after Christmas which doesn't occur each year. Thus, were one never to attend any weekday Eucharists but come to every Eucharist each Sunday this would be the only OT passage definitely heard every year.

Our passage came from the Prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah along with Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel are considered the Major Prophets of the Old Testament Books. The other twelve, such as Micah, Joel, Malachi, and Amos, are all consider Minor Biblical prophets. Whether Major or Minor is due to the length of the prophet's writing, which were written down by others such as Baruch did for Jeremiah.

Now these prophets were not writers though, ala C.S. Lewis, but rather preachers. Furthermore, they did not speak from behind the safety of a pulpit but out in the open air (where folks could throw things at them).

The four Major prophets were never considered the greatest of all OT prophets or holier than the other twelve Minor Prophets. Indeed there are some mighty OT prophets who have no writings with their names on them but whom all immediately would recognize, such as Moses, Elijah, Elisha, or the very last OT prophet: John the Baptist.

Isaiah predates the other Major Prophets, although it is possible Jeremiah may have been a toddler when Isaiah died. But the three other Major prophets overlap much more and could have been familiar with each other at least to some extent. This is especially so with Ezekiel and Daniel who both were taken to and prophesied in Babylon. Daniel actually was a mover and shaker in the Babylonian empire and then the later Persian empire because of his ability to interpret dreams or, literally, the handwriting on the wall.

Jeremiah though began his ministry around 627BC just shortly before Ezekiel was born. So when the Babylonians took over Jerusalem Jeremiah had been prophesying for thirty years, Isaiah had been dead about half a century, Ezekiel was a man in his mid-twenties and Daniel a toddler or very young child.

Jeremiah's ministry stretched through the last five kings of Judah including the last proper Davidian king, Jeconiah, and then his uncle, Zedekiah, placed on the throne by the conquering Babylonians in 597BC. Jeremiah's very last prophecy appears to have been a few years after the destruction of the Temple ten years later in 587BC. Having been *persona non gratia* within Jerusalem with the kings for quite some time--cursing out kings leads to that-- and often imprisoned (indeed he had been kept for some time in a cistern) he was released by Nebuchadnezzar and ordered to be treated **well**.

And so Jeremiah was allowed to live wherever he wanted and chose to go to Mizpah about 8 miles north of the devastated city. A few years later Johanan was made governor of Judah after an assassination of the existing governor. Yet, not long afterwards, and against Jeremiah's advice, Johanan actually decided to flee with many inhabitants, such as the king's daughters, in a reverse Exodus **back** to Egypt. He took Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch which is where the prophet appears to have died.

“*And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples.”*

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So, we have reached the end of the Church year, or will in seven days and six hours. In most of the Western Church, today has become the feast of *Christ the King*. While our Province usually celebrates this solemnity last month on its original date at the end of October, we have no issue with drawing attention to Christ's kingship over the entire world every day, a reality to which Jeremiah in our Epistle looked forward so long ago.

Perhaps it is not mere coincidence that we have every year this Gospel lesson about feeding lots of hungry mouths just before or after Thanksgiving Day. We have here in John his recollection of Jesus' feeding of the five thousand. Matthew also has an account which is very similar.

Matthew's does provide some additional details not in today's passage, such as... it was toward evening... and that his disciples approached Jesus about sending the multitude away. We also learn from Matthew, that it was not just 5,000 people, but 5,000 people NOT including women and children. So we have quite a huge crowd indeed! Finally, we also learn explicitly from Matthew, something unclear but still important from today's passage, that the disciples assumed the multitude should take care of themselves!

Putting the two accounts together we get a fuller picture. It seems likely that Jesus was approached by his followers at dusk who suggested that the time had come for the hoard to be sent on their way so they all might still find their own dinner. Jesus replied, instead, that his **disciples** should feed them, to which they responded, effectively, “you have got to be kidding! We only have this little bit of bread and a couple of fishes and you want us to feed a stadium of hungry people!”

Certainly the food supply was woefully inadequate to feed even five hungry people, much less well over five thousand. And Jesus obviously was aware that his multitude of listeners had grown very hungry. But rather than just expediently sending them away with probably a few going to bed hungry or fainting from hunger on the way, he told his disciples that ...they had a responsibility to them. There was a need right in front of them that needed to be addressed.

Furthermore, he told them that just because adequate help looked impossible did not mean one was excused from doing whatever he could. One always at least can give his best shot with the abilities and resources at hand. Just because we can not solve world hunger does not mean we should never give canned goods to a shelter.

Helping others often seems hopeless. The devil certainly encourages our doubts about futility or risks involved. “What is helping one family going to accomplish?”, we hear inside our heads? Or, "is not just helping one person unfair to everybody else in need?! What will ten dollars do??!" These demonic doubts need to be ignored. To the people we actually help our aid can be valuable, even **in**valuable.

Personal safety for ourselves or those around us of course is a legitimate concern. We owe a higher duty to our family than to people we do not know. It may not be a safe idea to open one's purse on a busy city street or escort someone to shelter, but we ought to know directions to nearby shelters and can take the money we might have given out of hand and give it to shelters.

While our economy has been in the doldrums since Covid, we still have more wealth and prosperity than any society ever has known. We still have more free time and more luxury than any nation, outside maybe Luxemburg or Monaco. Our worries, even such truly significant ones as making our mortgage payments, would be hoped for dreams for many, many others in the world. We have **luxury** problems; others have **poverty** or even **survival** problems.

We all have heard that, “with God nothing is impossible”. Whenever we hear it we may think that "well then, God would do well to take care of the problem!" But Jesus did not just make a supply train of hamburgers & French fries appear out of nowhere.

No, he helped his disciples take care of THEIR responsibility for helping others in need in front of them. He took what they had, offered it up to God to accomplish His will, and low and behold, it was suddenly sufficient. What's more, it was much more than sufficient. The five thousand did not each get just an apple for the trip back, but they “were satisfied”. But even beyond that, his disciples then proceeded to pick up MORE than they even had started with!! (Now that's generosity!)

When confronted with what we believe is a real need to help others we might feel overwhelmed. We need not. Jesus today is telling us how to approach the situation. If we take what we have, as puney as it might seem, and pass it through **his** hands to do **his** will, it will become sufficient. If He so wills it.

Time, energy, age, money, all may seem genuine limitations in addressing any problem. We may truly think, “Lord, there is no way I can do this myself. This is all I got, please help.”

That, is all we have to say. Jesus takes what we do have to work with, passes it through his hands, and it becomes **more** than what was needed. Such offering up to the Lord will lead to us to plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works. AMEN. +