

**Lectionary Readings:**    **Jeremiah 20: 1-11a**  
**Psalm 64**  
**Romans 14: 1-17**  
**Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20**

The first two verses of the reading from Jeremiah raise a question:

<sup>1</sup>When the priest Pashhur son of Immer, the official in charge of the temple of the LORD, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things,

<sup>2</sup> he had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put in the stocks at the Upper Gate of Benjamin at the LORD's temple.

The question – what had Jeremiah been prophesying for Pashur to take this action against him?

For the answer we need to go back to the previous chapter (19):

<sup>1</sup>This is what the LORD says: 'Go and buy a clay jar from a potter.'

Take along some of the elders of the people and of the priests <sup>2</sup> and go out to the Valley of Ben Hinnom, near the entrance of the Potsherd Gate.

There proclaim the words I tell you, <sup>3</sup> and say, "Hear the word of the LORD, you kings of Judah and people of Jerusalem.

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: listen! I am going to bring a disaster on this place that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle.

<sup>4</sup> For they have forsaken me and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned incense in it to gods that neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah ever knew, and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent.

<sup>5</sup> They have built the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as offerings to Baal – something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind.

<sup>6</sup> So beware, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when people will no longer call this place Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter.

<sup>7</sup> "In this place I will ruin<sup>[a]</sup> the plans of Judah and Jerusalem. I will make them fall by the sword before their enemies, at the hands of those who want to kill them, and I will give their carcasses as food to the birds and the wild animals.

<sup>8</sup> I will devastate this city and make it an object of horror and scorn; all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff because of all its wounds.

<sup>9</sup> I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh because their enemies will press the siege so hard against them to destroy them."

<sup>10</sup> Then break the jar while those who go with you are watching, <sup>11</sup> and say to them, "This is what the LORD Almighty says: I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired.

They will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room.

<sup>12</sup> This is what I will do to this place and to those who live here, declares the LORD. I will make this city like Topheth.

<sup>13</sup> The houses in Jerusalem and those of the kings of Judah will be defiled like this place, Topheth – all the houses where they burned incense on the roofs to all the starry hosts and poured out drink offerings to other gods."

<sup>14</sup> Jeremiah then returned from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy, and stood in the court of the LORD's temple and said to all the people,

<sup>15</sup> 'This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Listen! I am going to bring on this city and all the villages around it every disaster I pronounced against them, because they were stiff-necked and would not listen to my words."

**Footnotes**

a. [Jeremiah 19:7](#) The Hebrew for *ruin* sounds like the Hebrew for *jar* (see verses 1 and 10).

Once again we see the oft repeated pattern – Judah turning from the Lord; worshipping Baal (at this point in time it appears to be extreme); the Word of the Lord, promising destruction, coming through the words of Jeremiah.

When we read in Jeremiah 20:1 that the priest, Pashur, was “the official in charge of the temple” we might think he was the ‘High Priest’. We would be wrong - he was a high ranking temple official and one of his responsibilities was ‘Security. It was in this capacity that he acted against Jeremiah:

Pashhur son of Immer was a priest and the chief of temple security. He heard what I had said,  
(Contemporary English Version)

Now Pashhur son of Immer heard Jeremiah prophesy these things. He was the priest who was chief of security in the LORD's temple.  
(New English Translation)

When the priest Pashur (son of Immer, chief officer of the temple *guard*) heard what Jeremiah was prophesying,  
(The Voice)

Pashhur son of Immer was a priest. He was the highest officer in the Temple of the LORD. When he heard Jeremiah say those things in the Temple yard,  
(Easy to Read Version)

Now Pashhur the son of Immer, the priest who was also chief governor in the house of the LORD, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things.  
(New King James Version)

We can make a modern day comparison with cathedral authorities – the relationship of ‘Bishop’ to ‘Dean and Chapter’.

One of the commentators describes the stocks at the gate to the temple:

"They were intended both for restraint and torture. They held the feet, hands, and neck so that the body was almost doubled up. Jeremiah was put in the stocks at the Upper Benjamin Gate, one of the city's most conspicuous places."

No doubt Pashur expected Jeremiah to retract his message when released the next morning, but if so he was very, very mistaken. The prophecy is now intensified – both personally for Pashur and for Judah, specifying the Babylonian exile. Our commentator records that Pashur probably means "ease" or "tranquillity"; then goes on to say:

"Jeremiah now gave Pashur a new name – "Magor-Missabib", meaning "terror on every side".

From that time he would be "Mr. Terror All-around".

The new name symbolized the terror Pashur would be to himself and to those about him as a consequence of what the Babylonians would instill in the people of Judah."

The second half of the reading is given the heading "**Jeremiah's complaint**". It is a complaint made by the Prophet to the Lord.

In the New International Version, Jeremiah 20:7 reads:

<sup>7</sup> You **deceived** me, LORD, and I was **deceived**; you overpowered me and prevailed.

An alternative (and possibly preferable?) translation is offered:

<sup>7</sup> You **persuaded** me, LORD, and I was **persuaded**; you overpowered me and prevailed.

Jeremiah is clearly exasperated at constantly bringing a message of violence and destruction to the people of Judah.

It is affecting the way in which he is seen and treated by the people.

"*The word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long*".

Jeremiah, however, goes on to say:

But if I say, 'I will not mention his word or speak any more in his name,'

**his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones.**

**I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.**

The reading ends with the first half of Jeremiah 20:11. The Prophet appears to have regained his confidence in the Lord, his 'complaint' appears to be over. The whole of verse 11 reads:

**11 But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior;** so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail.

They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonour will never be forgotten.

Reading verse 1 of Psalm 64 in the NIV translation an 'unusual' word is encountered – one that has already been seen in the reading from Jeremiah; that word is '**complaint**'.

The NIV Bible Commentary describes this psalm as a '**Prayer for Protection**' and describes it as an *individual lament*, expressive of an unwavering belief in divine retribution (*lex talionis*).

The psalm is divided into four sections:

I. Petition (v.1)

II. Prayer for Protection From the Enemies (vv.2-6)

III. God's protection and Vengeance (vv.7-9)

IV. Rejoicing and Encouragement (v.10)

David fears for his life, he knows that he faces much opposition – there are those who would like to 'do away with him'.

It is in this light that he makes his 'Petition':

**1 Hear me, my God,** as I voice my complaint; **protect my life from the threat of the enemy.**

Jeremiah, similarly, brought his 'complaint' to the Lord when he had suffered physical harm and when he felt the continued opposition of the people of Judah to his prophetic message.

The Daily Study Bible reminds us that:

"The Word of God is alive, just because God is the living God. Psalm 64 in fact echoes the cry of countless men and women down the centuries who live in terror in the police states of the world. The Word of God is 'alive', therefore Psalm 64 is 'alive' and people gain new hope and new strength on reading it."

Both Jeremiah and David conclude the readings that are our Lectionary passages with statements of confidence in the Lord. Verse 11 of Jeremiah 20 is printed above; David concludes the psalm with these words:

<sup>7</sup> But God will shoot them with his arrows; they will suddenly be struck down.

<sup>8</sup> He will turn their own tongues against them and bring them to ruin; all who see them will shake their heads in scorn.

**9 All people will fear; they will proclaim the works of God and ponder what he has done.**

**10 The righteous will rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in him; all the upright in heart will glory in him!**

The ‘persecuted’ peoples mentioned in the Daily Study Bible, make for us, a connection with the recently launched “Walking with Micah Project” of the Methodist Church.

This two year project focuses on “Methodist Principles for Social Justice”.

I wonder if any of you saw the inaugural streamed lecture two weeks ago entitled ‘Justice and Hope’?

It was given by the Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown; our former prime minister; a member of the Church of Scotland; and a son of the manse.

Investigate “Walking with Micah” on the internet – the lecture is still available and further details of the project are available through Rachel Lampard (contact details on the web-site).      Micah 6: 6-8 reads:

**6** With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?  
**7** Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?  
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?  
**8** **He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.**  
**And what does the LORD require of you?**  
**To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly (or prudently) with your God.**

In the reading from Romans 14 Paul is giving very straightforward and practical teaching to the Christians in the capital city of the empire. He is clearly addressing a problem which has arisen in that early church regarding the way Christians live their everyday lives – what they do or do not eat etc.

The passage in the NIV is headed ‘**The weak and the strong**’. From the outset he groups together those of strong faith and those whose faith is weak saying the Lord has accepted both:

<sup>1</sup>Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarrelling over disputable matters.  
<sup>2</sup> One person’s faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.  
<sup>3</sup> The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, **for God has accepted them.**

The underlying principle in his teaching is ‘**love**’:

<sup>13</sup> Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling-block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.  
<sup>14</sup> I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean.  
<sup>15</sup> If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, **you are no longer acting in love.** Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died.

Paul reminds us too that one day **we will have to give an account of our lives** – our attitudes; and of all we have said or done:

<sup>10</sup> You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister?<sup>[a]</sup> Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat.    <sup>11</sup> It is written:  
“As surely as I live,” says the Lord,  
“Every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.”<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>12</sup> So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

**Footnotes**

- a. [Romans 14:10](#) The Greek word for brother or sister (*adelphos*) refers here to a believer, whether man or woman, as part of God’s family; also in verses 13, 15 and 21.  
b. [Romans 14:11](#) Isaiah 45:23

In the concluding verse we are reminded of the substance of the kingdom of God. The passage below takes us beyond the end of the Lectionary reading, to the end of the chapter:

<sup>17</sup> For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of **righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,**  
<sup>18</sup> because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.  
<sup>19</sup> Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.  
<sup>20</sup> Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.  
<sup>21</sup> It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.  
<sup>22</sup> So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves.  
<sup>23</sup> But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

The Gospel reading from Luke describes Jesus sending out the seventy-two (some manuscripts only have seventy!). They are being sent out to towns and places where Jesus was about to go. He tells them that “*the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field*”.

A ‘song’, by Chris Bowater that I have reproduced before is (partly) based on Luke 10:2:

*Here I am, wholly available:  
As for me, I will serve the Lord.  
Here I am, wholly available:  
As for me, I will serve the Lord.*

The fields are white unto harvest,  
But O, the labourers are so few;  
So Lord, I give myself to help the reaping,  
To gather precious souls unto You.

The time is right in the nation  
For works of power and authority;  
God’s looking for a people who are willing  
To be counted in His glorious victory.

As salt are we ready to savour?  
In darkness are we ready to be light?  
God’s seeking out a very special people  
To manifest His truth and His might.

I have had the privilege of participating in worship led by Chris seated at his keyboard – as a classically trained musician his ministry is through music, at the keyboard, where he senses the empowering and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is often with hesitation that he will use the song above – the “feel” of the meeting has to be right for it is more than a reference to the Luke passage; it is a direct challenge to anyone who sings it to become one of those ‘extra workers’ in the harvest field.

Can we always sing, with 100% honesty, “*Here I am, wholly available: As for me I will serve the Lord*”?

Returning to the Bible passage; the instructions given to the ‘disciples’ by Jesus seem rather harsh. We can happily accept the way they are to treat those who welcome them, those who offer hospitality, but it is the action they should take when rejected that seems so out of character with other Bible passages about Jesus.

Perhaps the key is given in verse 16:

**<sup>16</sup> ‘Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.’**

We find the seventy-two returning with joy – their mission has obviously been successful and they are full of the things they have done.

Jesus issues a caution to them (which can also apply to us):

**<sup>19</sup> I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.**

**<sup>20</sup> However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’**

Have we the confidence, the faith, to act on verse 19? Do we have the assurance given in verse 20?

O Breath of Life, come sweeping through us,  
Revive Thy church with life and pow'r.  
O Breath of Life, come, cleanse, renew us,  
And fit Thy church to meet this hour.

O Wind of God, come, bend us, break us,  
Till humbly we confess our need;  
Thee in Thy tenderness remake us,  
Revive, restore; for this we plead.

O Breath of Love, come, breathe within us,  
renewing thought and will and heart:  
Come, love of Christ, afresh to win us,  
Revive Thy church in every part.

Revive us, Lord! is zeal abating  
While harvest fields are vast and white?  
Revive us, Lord, the world is waiting,  
Equip Thy church to spread the light.

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