

Lectionary Readings: Joshua 5:13 – 6:20
Psalms 127
Matthew 11: 20-30

The nation of Israel has crossed the Jordan – opposite Jericho; and have established a camp on the plains around that city where they celebrate Passover and another significant event occurs: (Joshua 5)

¹⁰ On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover.

¹¹ The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain.

¹² **The manna stopped the day after^[a] they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate the produce of Canaan.**

Footnotes

a. [Joshua 5:12](#) Or *the day*

Prior to crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land, Joshua sent spies to investigate the land and particularly the city of Jericho. We read in Joshua 2 of the part Rahab played in protecting the two men Joshua had sent and of her accepting the sovereignty of the Lord:

¹ Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. ‘Go, look over the land,’ he said, ‘especially Jericho.’ So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.

² The king of Jericho was told, ‘Look, some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.’

³ So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: ‘Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land.’

⁴ But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, ‘Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from.’

⁵ At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don’t know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them.’

⁶ (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.)

⁷ So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

⁸ Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof⁹ and said to them, ‘I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.’

¹⁰ We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea^[a] for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed.^[b]

¹¹ When we heard of it, our hearts sank^[c] and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

¹² ‘Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign¹³ that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them – and that you will save us from death.’

Footnotes

a. [Joshua 2:10](#) Or *the Sea of Reeds*

b. [Joshua 2:10](#) The Hebrew term refers to the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the LORD, often by totally destroying them.

c. [Joshua 2:11](#) Hebrew *melting in fear*.

Our reading today – **The fall of Jericho** – commences with Joshua receiving a vision from the Lord. It is clear, from the text, that initially he is uncertain about this ‘man with a drawn sword’; for he asks ‘*Are you for us or for our enemies?*’ The man’s role as ‘commander of the army of the Lord’ is revealed; Joshua falls to the ground in reverence and like Moses at the time of the burning bush is told to ‘*take off his sandals, for the place where he is standing is holy*’.

The commander of the Lord’s army delivers a precise ‘battle plan’ – one that is going to call for complete trust and obedience from the Israelites and we have seen on many occasions in the past how they have at one moment followed the Lord and immediately after rebelled and complained.

The plan is simple! For six days all the armed men are to march around the city **once** only. They are to be led by the Ark of the Covenant and in front of the Ark are to be seven priests carrying trumpets made from rams’ horns and ahead of them some of the armed men. The remainder formed a rear guard behind the Ark.

Trumpets made from rams’ horns were not intended to be musical instruments but were used for military signalling or in religious ceremonies. We can see a combination of military and religious intentions in this account – Jericho was probably the centre of Canaanite religion (Jericho probably means “moon city” suggesting worship of the moon god).

The Lord, through Joshua, was overcoming the temporal **and** the spiritual power of Canaan.

In this formation, they marched around the city with the priests blowing their horns. Joshua had commanded the army, before they set out, that they were to utter no war cry or raise their voices in any way.

This single circumnavigation of the city was repeated for a total of six days – the army returning to camp each day when it was completed.

On the seventh day they repeated their former action but on this day they marched around the city seven times. Now comes a moment when Joshua gives instructions to shout: (Joshua 6)

¹⁶ The seventh time round, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, 'Shout! For the LORD has given you the city!

¹⁷ The city and all that is in it are to be devoted^[a] to the LORD. **Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent.**

¹⁸ But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it.

¹⁹ **All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury.'**

²⁰ When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, **the wall collapsed**; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city.

Footnotes

a. Joshua 6:17 The Hebrew term refers to the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the LORD, often by totally destroying them; also in verses 18 and 21.

They marched on each of seven days – what about the Sabbath, or was that the final day of victory?

If we read on to the end of chapter 6:

²¹ They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it – men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.

²² **Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, 'Go into the prostitute's house and bring her out and all who belong to her, in accordance with your oath to her.'**

²³ So the young men who had done the spying went in and brought out Rahab, her father and mother, her brothers and sisters and all who belonged to her. They brought out her entire family and put them in a place outside the camp of Israel.

²⁴ Then they burned the whole city and everything in it, but they put the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the LORD's house.

²⁵ **But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho – and she lives among the Israelites to this day.**

²⁶ At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: 'Cursed before the LORD is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho:

'At the cost of his firstborn son he will lay its foundations;
at the cost of his youngest he will set up its gates.'

²⁷ **So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land.**

Psalm 127 is a song of ascent attributed to Solomon – not all witnesses to the text attribute it to him; but as the NIV Study Bible comments, "*If Solomon was not the author, it is easy to see why some thought him so*".

The Study Bible, in introducing the psalm, says of it:

Godly wisdom concerning hearth and home. Its theme is timeless; it reminded the pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem that all of life's securities and blessings are gifts from God rather than their own achievements (see Deuteronomy 28:1-14).

Two balanced stanzas develop, respectively, two distinct but related themes.

In contrast, the NIV Bible Commentary describes this "psalm of ascent as a *wisdom* psalm, the futility of life, and the blessing of God are two contrasting themes". It gives the psalm the overall title "**The Blessing of God**".

There is a division into two sections – verses 1-2 comprise the first (*Futility and Blessing*) and verses 3-5 the second (*God's Blessing on the Family*). These two sections would appear to correspond to the 'balanced stanzas' mentioned in the Study Bible.

We find a very different view (!) in the introduction that Matthew Henry gives in his 18th Century Commentary:

This is a family-psalm, as divers before were state-poems and church-poems. It is entitled (as we read it) "for Solomon", dedicated to him by his father. (*We have noted before, Matthew Henry's habit of attributing psalms to the pen of David*) He having a house to build, a city to keep, and seed to raise up to his father, David directs him to look up to God, and to depend upon his providence, without which all his wisdom, care and industry, would not serve. Some take it to have been penned by Solomon himself, and it may as well be read, "a song of Solomon", who wrote a great many; and they compare it with the Ecclesiastes, the scope of both being the same, to show the vanity of worldly care and how necessary it is that we keep in favour with God.

On him we must depend, I. for wealth (vv.1&2). II. For heirs to leave it to (vv.3-5).

In singing this psalm we must have our eye up unto God for success in all our undertakings and a blessing upon all our comforts and enjoyments, because every creature is that to us which he makes it to be and no more.

515 in Singing the Faith , written by Jonathan Nowell, uses verse 1 of the psalm in its refrain:

*Unless the Lord builds the house
we labour in vain.
Unless the Lord lays the plans
we have no foundations.
Unless your will is in our hearts
we uselessly strive.
Come, Lord Jesus, build this house again.*

We are a people whose life comes from you,
we were created with hearts meant to praise you,
you are beside us in all that we do,
but so often our faith runs out,
hearts that should be praising, doubt,
Lord, remind us what we are about

We are a family whose likeness is yours,
we were created with you as our Father,
we know you love us despite all our flaws,
but we make your Kingdom wait,
with love that tends to hesitate;
make us brave, and let's fling wide the gates!

We need to carry your will in our heart,
we need your purpose as our aspiration,
we need your courage, each day a new start,
help us to see your people's needs,
breathe into our words and deeds,
plant in us your grain of mustard seed.

This is the only hymn/song that is linked to psalm 127 in the Scriptural Index of Singing the Faith; Hymns and Psalms on the other hand lists three – and in H&P 240, Georg Weissel (translated by Catherine Winkworth) associates verse 2 with the opening verse of the psalm:

Lift up your heads, you mighty gates,
behold the King of Glory waits,
the King of kings is drawing near,
the Saviour of the world is here.

O blest the land, the city blest
where Christ the ruler is confessed!
O happy hearts and happy homes
to whom this King in triumph comes!

Fling wide the portals of your heart,
make it a temple set apart
from earthly use for heaven's employ,
adorned with prayer and love and joy.

Come, Saviour, come, with us abide;
our hearts to thee we open wide:
Thy Holy Spirit guide us on,
until our glorious goal is won.

There are two sections to our Gospel reading – “**Woe on unrepentant towns**” and “**The Father revealed in the Son**”.

In the first – Jesus denounces the towns where most of His miracles had been performed but His message had been ignored and the people remained unrepentant.

Little is known of the first named – Chorazin. It is mentioned in the Jewish literature, the Talmud - The fertile volcanic soils surrounding Chorazin yielded an excellent quality of wheat and the Talmud refers to Chorazin's wheat as worthy of providing the *omer*, or first fruits offering, but the city's distance from Jerusalem proved prohibitive.

The location has been identified by general consent with the modern Kerazeh, about 2½ miles up the Wady Kerazeh from Capernaum; i.e., Tell Hum.

Bethsaida, like Chorazin and Capernaum is in Galilee. John's Gospel tells us that it was the home town of Peter, Andrew and Philip. It is just outside Bethsaida that Jesus restores sight to a blind man (recorded in Mark's Gospel) and in Luke chapter 9 the “Feeding of the Five Thousand” takes place near the town/village.

Capernaum is well known from the Gospels – it became the base for Jesus' ministry and was the lakeside home for a number of his ‘fishermen’ disciples: (Matthew 4)

Jesus begins to preach

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee.

¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali –

¹⁴ to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵ *‘Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles –*

¹⁶ *the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.’^[a]*

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’

Footnotes

a. Matthew 4:16 Isaiah 9:1,2

Jesus compares the lack of repentance shown in these towns to three ‘notorious’ places in the Old Testament. Tyre and Sidon were on the Mediterranean coast – found today in modern Lebanon. Tyre is located about 20 kilometres (14 miles) north of the current Israeli-Lebanese border, and Sidon is located about 20 miles (32 kilometres) north of Tyre.

BibleVerseStudy.com – found on the internet – gives this background:

Tyre and Sidon were two cities in the region God had assigned to the tribe of Asher to conquer when the Jews settled in the Promised Land. The tribe of Asher, however, disobeyed God when they found Tyre and Sidon well “**fortified**” (Joshua 19:29) and gave up.

Ever since then, Tyre and Sidon, both pagan cities, had been thorns in the side of Israel and often led it into idolatry:

"Then the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, ..." (Judges 10:6).

And Jezebel, the most wicked queen in the history of Israel, was a princess of Sidon:

"And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he (*Ahab*) took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshiped him" (1 Kings 16:31).

The third 'notorious' place that Jesus mentions is Sodom, usually associated with another city in the region – Gomorrah. We remember that a time had come when Abraham separated from his nephew Lot, giving the younger man the choice of the plains or the hills. Lot chose the former (better pastures etc.) and eventually ends up in Sodom – renowned for its depravity. In Genesis 19 we read of Lots flight from Sodom and the subsequent destruction of the city:

²³ By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land.

²⁴ Then the LORD rained down burning sulphur on Sodom and Gomorrah – from the LORD out of the heavens.

²⁵ Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities – and also the vegetation in the land.

The warning to his listeners is there – Jesus says "Repent". Given your present attitude it will go badly for you; even the 'notorious' and 'wicked' places such as Tyre, Sidon or Sodom would have repented if they had experienced the miracles you have seen.

When Jesus goes on to talk about his Father in Heaven he gives praise because the wise and learned have not understood but the "little children" (the uneducated etc.) have. Jesus says:

²⁷ 'All things have been committed to me by my Father.

No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Do we put ourselves into this last category – "*One to whom the Son chooses to reveal him*"?

The passage ends with comforting and reassuring words:

²⁸ 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'

The words may certainly be comforting and reassuring, but there is the implication of work to be done – hence the reference to the yoke. A number of definitions for yoke are found in dictionaries, two of the most relevant being:

- I. A wooden crosspiece that is fastened over the necks of two animals and attached to a plough or cart that they pull in unison.
- II. A frame fitting over the neck and shoulders of a person, used for carrying pails or baskets.

If we think of the first of these definitions, and Jesus saying "*Take my yoke upon you*" we realise that we are coupled to and working with Jesus Himself.

Is that our day by day experience? It should be.

Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go,
my daily labour to pursue,
Thee, only Thee, resolved to know
in all I think, or speak, or do.

The task Thy wisdom hath assigned
O let me cheerfully fulfil,
in all my works Thy presence find,
and prove Thy acceptable will.

*Preserve me from my calling's snare,
and hide my simple heart above,
above the thorns of choking care,
the gilded baits of wordly love.*

(Original verse, omitted in most Hymn Books)

Thee may I set at my right hand,
whose eyes my inmost substance see,
and labour on at Thy command,
and offer all my works to Thee.

Give me to bear Thy easy yoke,
and every moment watch and pray,
and still to things eternal look,
and hasten to Thy glorious day;

For Thee delightfully employ
whate'er Thy bounteous grace hath given,
and run my course with even joy,
and closely walk with Thee to heaven.