

Bishop's Lectionary Reflection - Proper 28, Year A
Twenty-fourth Sunday After Pentecost
November 15, 2020
The Rt. Rev. Susan B. Haynes

Judges 4:1-7

Psalm 123

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Matthew 25:14-30

Judges 4:1-7

Deborah, a prophetess, served as a judge of the Israelites. She lived in the country of Ephraim between Ramah and Bethel and would hear disputes from the Israelites on a daily basis. The writer takes care to place this text historically, giving context clues for time and place: “after Ehud died...King Jaban of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-ha-goiim.” This is not a good time for the Israelites. They have strayed from the path of the Lord and done evil things. As a result they suffered by being sold to King Jabin. Deborah exhorts them to do what the Lord says so that they will be restored. Sometimes it is hard to relate to these historical texts that seem so far removed from us. But the message is clear – do what the Lord commands and strive to walk in His path and He will always be ready to assist you. But stray from the Lord, and consequences are that you will sense His absence and experience a sort of bondage.

God is always ready to be merciful when we turn to Him for help. Where in your life do you feel trapped or in bondage? Look for those places, situations, circumstances, relationships where you feel anger, resentment, fear or sadness. Commit those to the Lord and He will assist you with them and will draw you to Himself. Make a list and present them to God each day in prayer.

Psalm 123

“To you, I lift up my eyes, to you enthroned in the heavens...” The words of this well-known psalm remind us of the kind of dependence we should have on God and of how our focus should always be trained in His direction. The psalmist likens the focus to the way a servant pays attention to his or her master or mistress – focused exclusively on the one being served so as not to miss any direction. Such focus results in receiving God’s mercy which is more benevolent and life-giving than any of the wealth in the world.

Is your focus constantly trained on God and His word? Are you a vigilant student of God’s ways so that you will not miss any of His direction? Christians are exhorted to be attentive to God through prayer and study of Scripture. We often forget that as children of God, we benefit from paying attention to what God wants.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

In the continuation of this epistle to the Thessalonian Christians, Paul reminds those who are waiting for the day of the Lord that this day will come unexpectedly. He contrasts Christians with other people (“they”) who proclaim peace and security and seem unaware that God is coming; consequently they will be caught off guard and surprised. “We” (or those who belong to Jesus) are different. We do not belong to the darkness like “they” do. We are children of the day and not of the night. We are sober and watchful and not drunken and unawares (as “they” are). With the apt analogy of putting on armor, Paul likens faith and love to a breastplate that will guard our heart, and hope and salvation to a helmet that will guard our head. Guarding our heart and head, our emotions and thoughts, is an important Christian endeavor. We should always be protecting ourselves from the assaults of the world so that we will not be destined for wrath. In such guarding, we should encourage one another and build each other up.

Do you have a Christian friend who can be an encouragement partner for you? Is there someone in your life who can remind you to guard your heart and your mind, so that you will always be focused on God and on the brightness of the day that He brings? Having such friends is one reason why being in Christian community is so important. We can build each other up. And if one of us is having a bad time and is inclined to darkness, we can be the light of Christ for that person. Is there someone in your world who could use a little Christ light?

Matthew 25:14-30

In yet another parable, Jesus explains that the Kingdom of God is a place where those who inhabit it are expected to use their abilities to further the interests of the King. A property owner needs to go on a trip, so he is placing the maintenance and oversight of his property in the hands of his slaves. Notice that he is intimately acquainted with the abilities of his slaves and gives them property to oversee in proportion to the abilities that they have. For the most part the property owner discerns well. To the slave that he gave the most, the slave increased the most. And to the slave that he gave the least, the slave did very little. The property owner rewards the one who does more with more, but takes away even the little that the one who does least has. God expects us to partner with Him to further His interests in this world. His interest is His people. He gives us abilities with which to accomplish our tasks. He knows us intimately because He seeks relationship with us. He knows our abilities because He created us and has endowed us with those abilities. We can accomplish whatever God asks us to do, because He wouldn't ask if He didn't know whether or not we had the capability of responding.

What has God asked you to do? Do you find yourself responding YES, knowing that God has given you whatever you need in order to accomplish His request? Or do you find yourself shrinking back from the task, maybe even wanting to pretend He hasn't requested because

you don't think you have what it takes? You have no idea how much God believes in you. Through you He can do infinitely more than you could possibly ask or imagine.

COLLECT:

Blessed Lord who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.