

## Pericope Study for Sunday, September 27, 2015 – Lectionary 26B

Presented Tue 9/22/15 by Richard Burgess

### Collect / Prayer of the Day (ELW)

Generous God, your Son gave his life that we might come to peace with you. Give us a share of your Spirit, and in all we do empower us to bear the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

### Presenter's Comments

In my opinion these three texts all present problems which have to be dealt with if the texts are read. While not the only topics touched on, they do raise questions concerning suicide, the connection between illness and sin, and the reality of child abuse. What are the possibilities of addressing these topics? Some possibilities include:

- Only reading those texts with which you are willing &/o able to deal with in the sermon.
  - Downside: These issues exist anyway and need to be addressed at some point in the life of every congregation.
- Dealing with one of the issues in the sermon and the other issues in programs, Bible studies, newsletter articles, etc outside of worship.
  - Downside: Your weekly sermon probably has one of the best returns on investment of the things you do in terms of people reached and time spent preparing. Other means could be time intensive.
- Dealing with all three topics in one sermon.
  - Downside: This is difficult and treacherous. It is easy to get confused and to confuse your hearers. I have read or been told more than once never to do this. But of course, I have – with decidedly mixed results.
  - Your suggestion?
    - Downside: ???

### Possible Sermon Titles for Lectionary 26B

As usual, use at your own risk.

	Num	Jas	Mk
Even Moses Got Depressed / Suicidal / Discouraged	X		
Ever Thought about Hurting Yourself?	X		
Prophet for a Day	X		
Would that All the LORD's People Were Prophets!	X		
Are You One of God's Elders? (You Might Be Surprised)	X	X	
Confession Heard and Forgiveness Proclaimed		X	
Covering Up a Multitude of Sins		X	
Healing For All That Are Sick		X	
Pray. Praise. Confess.		X	
Suffering? Cheerful? Sick? God Has Answers		X	
The Prayer of the Righteous – Powerful and Effective		X	
Abused? We Can Help.			X
Are You For Jesus or Against Him?			X
Have Salt. Be at Peace.			X
Where the Worm Never Dies and the Fire Is Never Quenched			X
Whoever Is Not Against Jesus Is For Him			X
You Can't Lose Your Reward If You Do It In the Name of Christ			X

**OT: Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29 (NRSV)**

<sup>4</sup>The rabble among them had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, "If only we had meat to eat! <sup>5</sup>We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; <sup>6</sup>but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at."

...

<sup>10</sup>Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, all at the entrances of their tents. Then the LORD became very angry, and Moses was displeased. <sup>11</sup>So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? <sup>12</sup>Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child,' to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors? <sup>13</sup>Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they come weeping to me and say, 'Give us meat to eat!' <sup>14</sup>I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me. <sup>15</sup>If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once—if I have found favor in your sight—and do not let me see my misery."

<sup>16</sup>So the LORD said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tent of meeting, and have them take their place there with you."

...

<sup>24</sup>So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD; and he gathered seventy elders of the people, and placed them all around the tent. <sup>25</sup>Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again.

<sup>26</sup>Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. <sup>27</sup>And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."

<sup>28</sup>And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, "My lord Moses, stop them!"

<sup>29</sup>But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!"

**Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:**

11.1-30 While it stands on its own fairly well, the questions are always begged of such highly redacted lessons, "What is missed by what is omitted?", and, "Do our congregations need to hear the whole chapter?"

11.10-15 Sometimes it seems that Moses is easily discouraged and a bit of a whiny complainer. In this passage he is also suicidal. True or just exaggerated dramatic effect? How do people in similar circumstances, particularly those prone to suicidal ideation, hear such texts? (The CDC reports that in 2008-2009 about 3.7% of American adults had had suicidal ideation at some time during the previous year. That's one of every 27 adult Americans. About one in 7 (0.5%) of those actually attempted suicide.) Can you preach on one of the other texts and still take care of the problems this one presents?

11.16 *the elders of Israel* What is our equivalent? Council members? Longtime, respected members of the congregation? Does it need to be limited to "elder" persons? How can we recognize, honor, and take advantage of our "elders of Israel"?

11.11.25 *prophesied* What does this mean? What would it mean today in your congregation?

11.25b *But they did not (prophesy) again.* Why such a fuss for a one-time prophecy session? Might there have been some enduring value?

11.29b *Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!* What would our congregations be like if this actually happened? More realistically, how would you handle someone who told you the Lord had put the Lord's spirit upon them?

\*<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6013a1.htm>

**Epistle: James 5.13-20 (NRSV)**

<sup>13</sup>Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup>Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup>The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup>Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. <sup>17</sup>Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. <sup>18</sup>Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

<sup>19</sup>My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, <sup>20</sup>you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

**Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:**

5.15 *anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.* What does this say about a connection between illness and sin? What do we do with this? Can you preach on one of the other texts and still take care of the problems this one presents? Likewise for the implied promise of healing given here.

5.16 *The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective* How is righteousness connected to prayer? Are some people's prayers heard or answered differently than others? What do we do with this?

11.17-18 Is Elijah's prayer and its connection to drought and rain magic?

5.20 *cover a multitude of sins* What does this mean? Does it contradict salvation by grace alone?

**Gospel: Mark 9.38-50 (NRSV)**

<sup>38</sup>John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." <sup>39</sup>But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. <sup>40</sup>Whoever is not against us is for us. <sup>41</sup>For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

<sup>42</sup>"If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. <sup>43</sup>If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.\* <sup>45</sup>And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell.\* <sup>47</sup>And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, <sup>48</sup>where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

<sup>49</sup>"For everyone will be salted with fire. <sup>50</sup>Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.

\*Verses 44 and 46 (which are identical with verse 48) are lacking in the best ancient authorities. (NRSV text note)

**Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:**

9.38-40 Assuming that you don't cast out a lot of demons in your congregation, but knowing that there are churches and televangelists that do, how do you handle this passage?

9.39 What is the connection between doing a *deed of power* and not being able soon afterward to speak evil of Christ? Concrete examples? Practical implications for faith &/o praxis?

9.40 Have you seen anyone give a cup of water to someone else who bore the name of Christ? How might (or do) we do this in our communities?

9.42 Having too many times seen the devastating and life long effects that can result from child abuse, I shudder when I read this verse. Statistics vary, but at least 25% of Americans (and therefore our congregations) have been the victim of childhood sexual abuse alone. Therefore about 25% of our children are or have been victims. It would also imply a significant percentage of our adults are or have been perpetrators. I.e, there are both vics and perps in our congregations when we preach this week. How can both justice and compassion be served? Can you preach on one of the other texts and still take care of the problems this one presents?

9.42-48 These verses seem a bit harsh. Are they? Do they imply a "hell" of everlasting punishment for some sinners? Some of your parishioners will likely have strong opinions on this. How will you deal with that?

9.43, 45, 47 "hell" = Gehenna, a garbage dump outside Jerusalem.

9.44, 46 Note the absence of these verses, explained in the text note\*. Note also that they are included in the main text of the KJV, so some particularly Biblically literate old timers may ask what happened to it.

9.48 *where their worm never dies* Who is the "they" of "their"?

9.49-50 I propose that these verses be dealt with as an image rather than a strict analogy. What would be the power of that image?