

Childlike Humility

SCRIPTURES

~~Proverbs 31:10-31 (Track 1)~~

Jeremiah 11:18-20 (Track 2)

~~Psalm 1 (Track 1)~~

Psalms 54 (Track 2)

James 3:13–4:3, 7–8a

Mark 9:30-37



Today's Readings

Today's readings call us to humility, compassion and service. Proverbs (Track 1) offers a model of the ideal wisdom seeker and Jeremiah (Track 2) struggles to understand the conflict that arises in his prophetic ministry. James tells us that humility and peaceableness show the wisdom of God. Today's gospel reading from Mark contrasts the disciples' battling over privilege with Jesus' proclamation of his radical approach to discipleship—placing ourselves at the disposal of the lowliest of the kingdom.

~~Proverbs 31:10-31 (Track 1)~~

Proverbs, a collection of concise statements and poetic instructions, is attributed in part to Solomon and to anonymous authors. Many scholars consider 31:10-31 as an epilogue composed by a later editor who wished to re-present the idealized feminine figure of Wisdom found in chapters 1–9.

Like Wisdom, the ideal wife is of more value than any earthly treasure and is a constant blessing to her family. The description of the wise woman comes to a climax with the summary of verses 30-31. Her wise activities and attitudes spring from her relationship with God. Thus the author describes for us the daily life of an individual who has perfectly mastered the counsel of the rest of the book and embodies it in the way she lives.

◆ What characteristics of the wife do you most admire? Why?

◆ How do women today exemplify the qualities praised by the author of Proverbs?

Jeremiah 11:18-20 (Track 2)

Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry to Judah about 626 BC and ended it about 580 BC. His career thus spanned the period of turmoil that culminated in Judah's final defeat by the Babylonians, the destruction of Jerusalem, the burning of the temple and the exile of most of the population.

Today's reading introduces the first (11:18–12:6) of Jeremiah's six personal laments (15:10-21, 17:14-18, 18:18-23, 20:7-13, 20:14-18). Jeremiah reflects on the hatred directed toward him and puts his confidence in God's plan. In spite of threats and persecution, suffering and sorrow, Jeremiah believes that God is sovereign over all the circumstances both of his life and of the life of the nation.

◆ How does Jeremiah describe himself and his crisis?

- ◆ With what characteristics of Jeremiah do you most identify?

James 3:13–4:3, 7-8a

Today's reading contains parts of two sections—the first one on earthly versus heavenly wisdom (3:13-18) and the second on causes of strife and warfare (4:1-6).

James first addresses the problem of factions and cliques within the Christian community. These apparently formed around those who claimed special wisdom (3:13), but such wisdom led to jealousy and division. Heavenly wisdom, on the other hand, is manifested by peace within the community.

Then the author turns to the question of the basic source of human hostility and aggression. This he finds in covetousness and competitiveness. Those who resort to violence, rather than to prayer, to obtain what they desire, are like adulterers who are unfaithful in their relationship to God. One cannot be intimate both with the world and with God. Those who pray but do not obtain their desires come to God with corrupt motives. They desire only their welfare and pleasure.

- ◆ What are some characteristics of heavenly wisdom?

- ◆ What are the primary internal sources of your conflicts with others?

- ◆ What can you do with others to help your Christian community “harvest justice”?

Mark 9:30-37

Today's reading begins a period of private ministry as Jesus concentrates on teaching the disciples. It includes the second and briefest of the three predictions of the passion in Mark (8:31; 10:32-34). As in the others, the prediction confuses the disciples, so Jesus teaches them about discipleship.

The mention of the resurrection in the predictions indicates clearly that, despite the lack of any account of resurrection appearances in the original ending of this gospel, the evangelist has no doubt about the fact and meaning of the resurrection. The disciples are typically dull, and they proceed to argue about their relative status in the kingdom.

Jesus responds with a paradox and an enacted parable. As he will achieve lordship only through the path of suffering, so his disciples must follow him in suffering and in service. In Jesus' culture, children were not idealized. Like women, they were of secondary importance and so also of lower social status. Thus, receiving a child as though he or she were Jesus enjoins upon the Christian community openness to all the lowly and rejected, for in Hebrew practice, someone's envoy was to be treated as that very person.

- ◆ What does Jesus' example of receiving a child (that is, a person of low status and extreme vulnerability) say to you about Christian leadership?

- ◆ Why does Jesus' view of greatness surprise the disciples?

- ◆ How does Jesus' teaching challenge the assumptions of our culture?

Reflection

In her book *Plan B*, Anne Lamott describes her idealistic vision as she begins a children's Sunday school. She wants to include *everyone*, just as Jesus did. But after a few experiences of *everyone's* quirks, she asks, "What was Jesus thinking"?

Even those of us who believe we're tolerant of the surly punk rocker or self-righteous church lady still meet surprising pockets of resistance to Jesus' inclusivity. Oddly, the most troublesome characters we meet are within ourselves. Who *is* that greedy, two-faced, manipulative, whiny liar? As Nathan pointed out to David, "That one is you."

So perhaps we follow this gospel by embracing the parts of ourselves that make us least proud. If we find it hard to wrap our arms around *that* person, we might ask Jesus for help to share his view of us as beloved children. If we can't welcome ourselves, we can create some strange projections of our inner demons onto others.

Looking to the larger society, Anne Lamott gets the last word: "Just look to see whose budgets are being cut these days—the old, the crazies, the children in Head Start—and that's where Jesus will be."

Quietly consider:

- ◆ What makes it most difficult to reject privilege and embrace humble service?

Prayer Starter

God, grant me heavenly wisdom which is pure, peaceable, gentle and willing to yield...

Food for Thought

"The great events of this world are not battles and elections but rather babies, for each child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged with humanity but is still expecting good-will to become incarnate in each human life."

—Edmond McDonald