

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity YEAR B September 27, 2015

It's a strange week this week in the Lectionary, and there are many different angles that could be taken. Keeping ourselves from sin, God's rescue of those in trouble, healing – these all appear in the readings this week. But, one theme seems to thread its way through all of the Scriptures – God's surprising and unexpected work through unexpected people in unexpected ways. This is that angle that is the focus of the resources and reflections below.

May our hearts be opened to the unexpected grace, the surprising opportunity and the serendipitous move of God's Spirit as we worship this week.

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

Esther 7 : 1-6, 9-10, 9 : 20-22

This reading gives us only a small glimpse into a lovely story. Esther is a Jewish girl who became queen in the Persian Empire. She was able to foil a plot by the evil Haman to execute all Jews. This work of saving her people is shown as the explanation for one of the great feasts in the Jewish calendar.

or **Numbers 11 : 4-6, 10-16, 24-29**

Moses laboured under the weight of leadership of the travelling israelites. He chose some elders to share the work. It became clear, as in today's Gospel, that beside those who are obviously chosen and set apart, others too can be seen to serve God's purposes.

Psalm 124

A celebration of God's help for God's people, remembering how, when their enemies sought to destroy them, God helped his people to escape.

or **Psalm 19:7-14**

In praise of God's law which brings joy, insight, truth, wisdom, and life, and which helps people to know when they have done wrong, which enables them to be cleansed.

James 5 : 13-20

Week by week we have heard James's letter of instruction. Finally he begs us always to turn to prayer in any sickness or distress. This passage is a familiar one to all engaged in the Christian ministry of healing.

Mark 9 : 38-50

There are many people, says Jesus, who do good work without acknowledging him as Lord, and we are not to despise them. The people to beware of are those who cause trouble, not those who do good.

TEXT OF READINGS

http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp21_RCL.html

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

Lord, we pray thee
that thy grace may always prevent and follow us,
and make us continually to be given to all good works;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity YEAR B September 27, 2015

Collect Two

Almighty God,
you have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you:
Teach us to offer ourselves to your service,
that here we may have your peace,
and in the world to come may see you face to face;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 1

Presider or deacon

Gathered in the Spirit of God, let us pray for all the needs of the world.

Deacon or other leader

For *N* our bishop and *N* our presbyter, for this holy gathering, and for the people of God in every place.

Lord, have mercy.

For mercy, justice, and peace among all peoples.

Lord, have mercy.

For abundant fruits of the earth and for this good and bountiful world.

Lord, have mercy.

For our city and those who live in it and for our families, companions, and all those we love.

Lord, have mercy.

For all those in desperate need: the sick and the suffering, prisoners, captives, and their families, the hungry, homeless, and oppressed.

Lord, have mercy.

For those who rest in Christ and for all the dead.

Lord, have mercy.

Lifting our voices with all creation, with _____, Michael and all the angels, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. To you, O Lord.

Presider

God of healing and salvation, hear the prayers we offer this day, forgive us our sins, and receive us into your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 2

P Lord, You have been our dwelling place for many generations. Continue to bless Your people with hope, and may all who cry to You in any need find mercy and grace sufficient for them. *(Silence for prayer.)*

P O Lord, You have set apart Your people by baptism and faith; keep them safe amid all the dangers and difficulties of this mortal life. Through Your Word and Sacraments, keep them in the salt of Your Gospel that they may not lose the everlasting reward You have prepared for those who love You. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity YEAR B September 27, 2015

- P Gracious Father, You sent us Your Son, not to condemn us, but to redeem us from our sin and from the power of death. Give us a strong and sturdy faith that we may believe for ourselves and proclaim for the benefit of others the good news of Him who called us from darkness to His marvelous light. Lord, in Your mercy,
- C hear our prayer.**
- P Almighty God, You appointed the nations and set up governments to protect Your people, to promote virtue, and to execute justice and equity into every corner of this world. Grant to us good and wise leaders who will respect You and be accountable to Your leading. Bless our political leaders, and all civic leaders and civil servants, that they may faithfully fulfil the responsibilities committed to them. Lord, in Your mercy,
- C hear our prayer.**
- P Merciful God, You have richly blessed us in every way, and with these gifts have laid upon us great responsibility. Give us hearts that are content with all Your blessings and generous in supplying those in need with the abundance of what You have entrusted to us. Lord, in Your mercy,
- C hear our prayer.**
- P Blessed Lord, You have established Your Church by Your grace, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. Lead and bless all who serve her as pastors and church workers, here in this congregation and throughout the Synod. Give Your Spirit and aid to the missionaries who plant Your Word, and bring to fruition all that You begin through their efforts. Lord, in Your mercy,
- C hear our prayer.**
- P Loving God, You claim our burdens as Your own, and You promise to grant us healing, comfort, and peace in all our afflictions. We pray for the sick, for all who suffer in any way [*especially* _____], for the grieving in their loss, and for the dying in their last hours [*especially* _____]. Be present with them, O Lord, and grant them healing and grace according to Your will. Lord, in Your mercy,
- C hear our prayer.**
- P Gracious Lord, move us to seek out the wanderer and those who have fallen away, that they may be restored by Your grace through forgiveness and be gathered among Your people once again. Give us patience and courage that we may not depart from the truth amid trials, but remain steadfast in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, in Your mercy,
- C hear our prayer.**
- P Mighty Lord of the harvest, help us to receive the bounty of the earth for the good of all who are in need. Guide us that we may be faithful stewards of all Your blessings and return to You the tithes and offerings of a grateful heart. Every good thing comes from You, O Lord, and we offer them back to You for the glory of Your name, for the care of those in need, and for the support of Your kingdom. Lord, in Your mercy,
- C hear our prayer.**
- P Into Your hands, O Lord, we place ourselves and all those for whom we have prayed. By faith we find contentment in Your will and trust in You to supply us with

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity YEAR B September 27, 2015

all that we need for this body and life, and for eternal life in Jesus Christ, through whom we pray.

C Amen.

POST COMMUNION

God our guide,
you feed us with bread from heaven
as you fed your people Israel.
May we who have been inwardly nourished
be ready to follow you
all the days of our pilgrimage on earth,
until we come to your kingdom in heaven.
This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS

Friends in Christ,
God invites us to hold the needs of our sisters and brothers
as dear to us as our own needs.
Loving our neighbours as ourselves,
we offer our thanksgivings and our petitions
on behalf of the church and the world.
Hear our prayers, God of power,
and through the ministry of your Son
free us from the grip of the tomb,
that we may desire you as the fullness of life
and proclaim your saving deeds to all the world. Amen.

As you heard the prayer of Isaac and Rebekah, O God,
and guided them in the way of your love,
so listen now to those who call upon you.
Move us to praise your gracious will,
for in Christ Jesus you have saved us from the deeds of death
and opened for us the hidden ways of your love.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lord God, friend of those in need,
your Son Jesus has untied our burdens
and healed our spirits.

We lift up the prayers of our hearts for those still burdened,
those seeking healing,
those in need within the church and the world.
Hear our prayers
that we may love you with our whole being
and willingly share the concerns of our neighbours. Amen.

Creator God,
you call us to love and serve you
with body, mind, and spirit
through loving your creation

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity YEAR B September 27, 2015

and our sisters and brothers.
Open our hearts in compassion
and receive these petitions
on behalf of the needs of the church and the world.
Holy One,
hear our prayers and make us faithful stewards
of the fragile bounty of this earth
so that we may be entrusted with the riches of heaven. Amen.

We praise your abiding guidance, O God,
for you sent us Jesus, our Teacher and Messiah,
to model for us the way of love for the whole universe.
We offer these prayers of love
on behalf of ourselves and our neighbours,
on behalf of your creation and our fellow creatures.
Loving God,
open our ears to hear your word
and draw us closer to you,
that the whole world may be one with you
as you are one with us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God of mercy and healing,
you who hear the cries of those in need,
receive these petitions of your people
that all who are troubled
may know peace, comfort, and courage.
Life-giving God,
heal our lives,
that we may acknowledge your wonderful deeds
and offer you thanks from generation to generation
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God of salvation,
who sent your Son to seek out and save what is lost,
hear our prayers
on behalf of those who are lost in our day,
receiving these petitions and thanksgivings
with your unending compassion.
Redeeming Sustainer,
visit your people
and pour out your strength and courage upon us,
that we may hurry to make you welcome
not only in our concern for others,
but by serving them
generously and faithfully in your name. Amen.

O God,
our guide and help in alien and contentious places:
as Esther prayed faithfully and worked courageously
for the deliverance of your people,
strengthen us to confront the oppressor
and free the oppressed,

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity YEAR B September 27, 2015

so that all people may know
the justice and unity of your realm. Amen.

Raise us up, O Lord,
for it is you alone who restores life and health
to the suffering
and to those who wander from the truth.
By your grace,
may we offer powerful and effective prayers
for one another and the world,
in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

LECTIONARY NOTES 1

Esther 7:1-6, 9-10, 9:20-22

- Fun fact: did you know God is not mentioned anywhere in the book of Esther? Even so, it is one of my favorite books. When I went to [Exploration](#) ten years ago, a verse from Esther, where Moredecai tells her that she may be where she is when she is "for such a time as this," was the theme of the weekend.
- Don't be misled. Though Esther was Queen, she didn't have any real power. If you read the whole book, you'll know that the previous queen was quickly ditched when she and the king clashed. So Esther's actions in this passage and elsewhere are extremely brave.
- In this passage, Haman, who is the "bad guy" gets brought to justice. Of course, biblical justice for Haman was being hanged. Ugh.

Psalm 124

- "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side" - whose side is God on? Is God always on our side? Is God always on the winning side? We want God to be on our side, but we'd do better to seek to be on *God's* side of things...
- This psalm is in thanks to God for escape from enemies. I've never had to literally flee from enemies, but I can relate, figuratively, to what the psalmist is feeling. From what dangerous persons/situations have you escaped by God's grace?

James 5:13-20:

- "confess your sins to one another" - hard to do! I think we are much more comfortable confessing our sins to God than we are in confessing them to our peers, our faith community. What's the benefit, do you think, of confessing our sins to others?
- James' list reads like an "easy solutions" guide, answers to FAQs from the church community about how to live rightly. If only it were as straightforward or easy as he makes it seem!
- "the prayer of the righteous is effective and powerful." What effect do you think your prayer has? What is the most powerful experience of prayer you've ever had?
- "whoever brings back a sinner" - what a powerful act. Have you ever done this for someone, or had someone do this for you?

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity YEAR B September 27, 2015

Mark 9:38-50

- "because he was not following us" - Definitely a contemporary issues. There is so much in-fighting in the church - Christians accusing one another of not being right enough to really be Christians. The end result? Alienating people from the good news.
- "Whoever is not against us if for us." Of course, else where, Jesus says, "whoever is not for us is against us," or something close to it. Each makes sense in the context in which Jesus speaks it though. Here: his point is that other people are doing good work in his good name - why criticize, just because it is a different approach, different leadership?
- stumbling blocks - think seriously about your life. Have you ever been responsible for putting a stumbling block in someone else's path?
- I recently read a great interpretation of this "if your foot causes you to stumble" section, in Brian McLaren's *The Secret Message of Jesus* - he was quoting Dallas Willard from an article in *Christian Scholars Review*. Willard argues that Jesus is simply reducing the principle of the Pharisees, "that righteousness lies in not doing anything wrong - to the absurd, in hope that they will forsake their principle and see and enter "the righteousness . . . beyond where compassion or love an not sacrifice is a fundamental thing." (pg. 124) What do you think?
- saltiness - do you have it? What does that mean, to be salty, salted with fire?

By Beth Quick

LECTIONARY NOTES

2

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

The Gospel and the Deuteronomy reading both have people who are "out" performing the same miraculous work that others, who are "in", are doing. In both cases someone tries to stop them (Joshua in Deuteronomy, and John in the Gospel) but in both cases the leaders say that they must not be stopped. In Jesus' case, he teaches that whoever is not against him is for him, and in Moses' case, he expresses his wish that all God's people would be prophets. In the Esther reading, we read of God's people being saved from evil (Haman) through some surprising opportunities that are used by some faithful people (Esther and Mordecai). Psalm 124 supports this reading, in its celebration of God's help for God's people. In James, all of God's people, especially the elders, are called on to pray and to live righteous lives, while taking the opportunities that arise to help one another stay true. Psalm 19 links with this reading through it's celebration of God's law that brings wisdom and life. Through the Lectionary readings this week, then, we find the call to embrace the unexpected and surprising work of God. Although this is not specifically drawn out in the Esther reading, this passage would need to be put in context, and in doing so, the serendipitous nature of Esther and Mordecai's rescue of their people becomes clear. It's easy for us to become so caught up in controlling ministry that we miss God's surprising work. It's so easy to get so caught up in the purity of our religion that we miss the work of God's Spirit in those with whom we disagree. But, if we are seriously committed to God's Reign – and not our own little dominions – we will learn to celebrate the surprising, unexpected and serendipitous work of God wherever, and through whomever, we may find it.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

www.churchnewsireland.org 1

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity YEAR B September 27, 2015

GLOBAL APPLICATION: It is amazing, when we look around, at the tremendous good that's being done in the world by various organisations. It's inspiring to see how many opportunities are arising and being taken, and how many people are being healed, saved, rescued and given a chance at life because of it. This is something we can and must celebrate. What is unfortunate is when groups are unable or unwilling to collaborate because of theological, ethnic, national, or operational differences. It is also unfortunate when hierarchies and structures keep from responding to surprising opportunities. Yet, God's desire is to bring wholeness to the world, and God will use whomever is available to do this work of healing. If we can recognise that compassion, done by anyone, is still compassion, and that we achieve far more when we pool resources and opportunities, so much more can be done. When political parties can learn to work together for the good of the people, instead of denouncing each other in order to gain or cling to power, we will see immense healing in our world. When religions and denominations can learn to work together for the good of the world, instead of competing with one another for converts and for dominance of the religious landscape, we will see immense healing in the world. When corporations can learn to work together for the good of the world, instead of fighting one another over control of ideas, and seeking legislation that protects them at the expense of freedom, collaboration and social contribution, there will be immense healing in our world. But, all of these scenarios require massive systemic changes which can only come about when we are willing to embrace serendipitous opportunities and creative solutions, and when we are willing to recognise that when we are not against each other (or Christ) we are for one another (and Christ).

LOCAL APPLICATION: The creativity that has come out people of faith, and church communities, has been an amazing healing and liberating force in the world for millennia. The arts have played very significant roles in every revival movement, every social reform movement and every liberation movement in human history. Communities which have been open to the creative move of God's Spirit, that have invited questions and experimentation, and that have been willing to reach out to others who are different to them, have made massive positive impacts on the world. But, much of this has been forgotten in the wake of exclusive, condemnatory, rigid and stagnant faith organisations. Followers of Christ are better known for silencing questions than embracing them in today's society. Churches are better known for rejecting and denouncing other faith communities, and other denominational groups, than embracing them and working with them. We seem to be far more eager to ensure that those who are "for" us look like us, speak like us, think like us and separate from those who don't, than we are ready to welcome those who are not "against" us. But, in the process, we may well be missing some of the unexpected work of God's Spirit that is happening around us. We may find that, instead of being liberators, healers and comforters, we have become oppressors and destroyers. What an amazingly attractive community the church could be, though, if local groups of Christians could find the openness and creativity to work alongside whomever they can to uplift, heal and celebrate their neighbours and neighbourhoods. When we are willing to let go of our need for "purity" and exclusivism, we might just find that we experience God through the stranger, and in the most unexpected places.

SERMON OUTLINE

Mark 9:38-50 we had to stop him.....

Following the Transfiguration, Jesus & his disciples returned to Capernaum where he began to teach them...

1. Sickness 38-41: Earlier they had been unable to heal a boy with an evil spirit when

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity YEAR B September 27, 2015

Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration. In contrast to their failure John reports to Jesus *someone casting out demons in your name, & we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.* He was unauthorised in their eyes – but note Jesus' reply *Do not stop him!* It's so easy to miss the point of this incident – the power of Jesus' name to heal... It was a *deed of power done in my name...* Even a *cup of water* in J's name will have its eternal reward - & is gratefully received...

2. Sin 42-48 The exclusive attitude of the disciples was causing problems –

so J continues 42 'If any of you put a stumbling-block GK skandalise = set a snare/trap before

one of these little ones who believe in me = lowly disciples –

so serious is the sin that J

declares *it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea – milos onikos* – 3ft diameter & 1ft deep – turned by donkey & used to grind grain – customary punishment in Israel & Roman Empire...

Such is the seriousness of sin that it is good to exercise spiritual surgery to save the soul - ⁴³*If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands & to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.* Heaven is worth such sacrifice

3 Salt 49-50. 49 For everyone will be salted with fire.

Most difficult verse – 20

explanations! Salt was a precious commodity - Christians are *the salt of the earth* so *have salt in yourselves & be at peace with each other...*

By Norman Porteous

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

"To Make the Wounded Whole," The Rev. Dr. Kenneth Carter, *Day 1*,
<http://day1.org/1436-to-make-the-wounded-whole>

"The Exorcist," Brian K. Blount, Duke Divinity School
<http://www.faithandleadership.com/sermons/the-exorcist>

"Getting Serious," the Rev. Dr. David Galloway, *Day 1*
<http://day1.org/1010-getting-serious>

"The Right Stuff," Dianne Bergant, CSA, *America*
http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=3177

"A Cup of Water or Unquenchable Fire," John R. Donahue, SJ, *America*
http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=2293

"Deliverance and Deli Meat," the Rev. Bonnie Scott, *Day 1*
<http://day1.org/4205-deliverance-and-deli-meat>

"Xerxes, Esther, Haman, and Mordecai," Frederick Buechner Sermon Illustrations.
<http://frederickbuechner.com/content/weekly-sermon-illustration-xerxes-esther-haman-and-mordecai>

CHILDREN

Worshiping with Children, Proper 21B, Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown

www.churchnewsireland.org! 1

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity YEAR B September 27, 2015

<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/year-b-proper-21-26th-sunday-in.html>

"Prayer Is Not Boring," Frances Woodruff, On the Chancel Steps

<https://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/2012/09/16/boring/>

"Sermon of the Week," Sermons 4 Kids, Charles Kirkpatrick. Object Lessons & Children's Sermons, Coloring Pages, Puzzles. Sermons4Kids.com.

<http://www.sermons4kids.com/>

"The Rainbow," "Who Belongs," Children's Time, in Sermons and Liturgies. Richard J. Fairchild. (Scroll down in liturgies to find Children's Time.)

<http://www.rockies.net/~spirit/sermons/b-or26su.php>

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

There's A Wideness In God's Mercy

What A Friend We Have In Jesus

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

Prayer Is The Soul's Sincere Desire

Everyone Belongs

Come You Thankful People, Come

You Are

All Are Welcome

Shine Jesus Shine