

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

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

10 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. 11 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? 12 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? 13 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!" 14 I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me. 15 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." 16 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."

24 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. 25 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. 26 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. 27 And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." 28 And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, "My lord Moses, stop them!" 29 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!"

James 5:13-20

13 Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. 14 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. 15 The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. 16 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. 17 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. 18 Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest. 19 My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, 20 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.

Mark 9:38-50

38 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." 39 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. 40 Whoever is not against us is for us. 41 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. 42 "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. 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 and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. 44 45 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. , 46 47 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, 48 where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched. 49 "For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 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."

“Who, Hell, Hyperbole”

[Exuberantly] This will be the *best sermon ever given on a Sunday morning in the great state of Washington.*

Some of you are thinking, who does he think he is?! Oh, if he’s lying he may go to the ‘bad place.’

Some of you may recall from last weekend’s installation worship where Pastor Latterell’s invoked the hope that as I serve in ministry I might grow in wisdom. After hearing that refrain of *God of Grace and God of Glory* where we ask grant us wisdom, grant us courage – in light of the seeming brazen boast maybe I need to be granted a little less courage. ☹️

Anyhow, this was a good week with lots of food for thought. At one point the thought literally from while having food. Being that a comment made by a colleague during communion caught me. I find it meaningful to receive communion so often distributing communion. She mentioned the gift of communion¹ is given not because of *who* you are – but because of *whose* you are. I ponder this in light of reflecting on being ‘possessed’ which we generally think of in a pejorative connotation. But what is it to so belong and be invested that the who you are is *because* of whose you are. I’d like to tell you about two people who knew that because of *whose* they were they were steadfast in their endeavors to get Scripture in people’s hands – one might say *possessed* by a certain resolve on behalf of God’s word. Today, Sept 30 is the festival that honors **Jerome**: “The Vulgate, Jerome’s translation of the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin, the language of the common people (the “vulgar” people), was in use for sixteen hundred years. Learned in languages and classical literature, one of Christianity’s greatest biblical scholars, and named one of the four great Doctors of the Western Church, Jerome was known also for a fierce polemical style in theological debate. He supported a community of women dedicated to biblical study...”² This Saturday, Oct 6 is the festival for **William Tyndale** who translated the New Testament and half the Old Testament into English. This bold and courageous act deeply threatened the established order by giving access to the Bible to a broader audience. Consequently, he lived under constant danger and ultimately died a martyr in 1536. “Yet in 1611, about 80% of the English translation authorized by King James 1 was Tyndale’s work, and many Biblical phrases still familiar to English-language Christians are Tyndale’s.”³ But the resolve to *share* God’s abundance via Scripture or service of neighbor is not uniform to Christian expression. Which begs of us the question: *How do you regard people who are following Jesus in a different way than you?*⁴ Some would rather conscript others to ‘hell’ through doctrinal gymnastics and asserted superiority. Makes you curious about this ‘hell’ we should seek to avoid.

¹ 9/25/18 communion Board of Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp - presider Rev. Jane Jebesen of Faith Lutheran, Golden, CO.

² Ramshaw, Gail. *More Days for Praise: Festivals and Commemorations in Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis, MN. 2016. 226-227.

³ Ibid. 232-233.

⁴ Prof. Rolf Jacobson during the Working Preacher Podcast www.workingpreacher.org/popoutplayer.aspx?podcast_id=1060

Now *there's* something you don't hear a lot at a Lutheran church. Here's a hellfire and brimstone sermon. Meaning where others invoke *fear* of hell – may we be disciples that are *wise* as to what Jesus is actually invoking. To be clear the English word 'hell' doesn't appear in the Bible scripturally. Translation gives us this rendering of the term *Gehenna*. Which *does* appear in Scripture as a place you wouldn't want to go in the spirit of invoking a place that we wouldn't want to go now. I thought to try to come up with a parallel here this good day but realized as soon as I would have said, no one wants to be from place Y, someone would note their family is from place Y so I'll shy away from an example. Hear this about Gehenna: "Gehenna is the Grk and Lat form of Valley of Hinnom, the name of a ravine S of Jerusalem, which, during the days of the monarchy, was the scene of an idolatrous cult involving the passing of children through fire. In the first century B.C. this name came to be used in a metaphorical sense, to denote the place of fiery torment believed to be reserved for the wicked either immediately after death or ultimately after the Last Judgment."⁵ Additionally, "Nowhere in the OT is the abode of the dead regarded as a place of punishment or torment. The concept of an infernal "hell" developed in Israel only during the Hellenistic period, probably under the influence of Persian idea."⁶ I share this with you to stir reflection on the concept – not to tell you whether or not to believe in such a place, but to be wise to what being referenced in Scripture.

One more idea that wrestled with my thinking quite a bit this week deliberating on proclamation was the use of hyperbole and exaggeration within the Gospel.⁷ Here's the deal, sometimes we say it in our own words, but where another has said it well or better I'll share that. Such a case today from Prof. Karoline Lewis, ponder this:

...it's easy to dismiss Jesus' hyperbole here when it comes to navigating the vast hermeneutical landscape that is making sense of Scripture. Those who choose to read the Bible literally, and then, as inerrant and infallible, are just fine to look past these injunctions, and yet insist on literal interpretation of passages that are far more ambiguous than our Gospel reading for this week. But, it's a slippery slope then, is it not? Jesus didn't really intend what he said, Jesus didn't really mean cut of your hand, and so therefore, did he really mean the seriousness of his words to his disciples. But once we cast-off Jesus' so-called exaggerations, it's all too comfortable to reject his primary point as well. Hyperbole becomes a distraction that can take us down an interpretational rabbit hole from which it is hard extract ourselves. All of a sudden, we are debating the meaning of the hyperbole rather than paying attention to its function. We start dancing around biblical literalism, all the while ignoring what the hyperbole is trying call out, what truth it is revealing, the significance of the claim to which the hyperbole is pointing. The function of the hyperbole is to magnify what's at stake. Hyperbole should not always be dismissed as mere hyperbole -- it points to truth, a truth that must be heard and must be taken seriously. Because it's a truth we want to hear -- that we could be the cause of someone tripping up in their discipleship. That we could be the cause of someone stumbling in their faith. That we could be the cause of someone questioning whether or not they are truly a critical and viable member of God's Kingdom. And we would rather blame another, or bend to safe and secure demonstrations of faith, than take accountability

⁵ "Gehenna," Buttrick, G. Arthur, Ed. The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia, Vol. E-J. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 1962. 361-362.

⁶ "Dead, Abode of The," Buttrick, G. Arthur, Ed. The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia, Vol. A-D. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 1962. 787-788.

⁷ Lewis, Rev. Dr. Karoline. "A Hyperbolic Hermeneutic" www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5228

for the ways in which we have prevented others from living into their fullness as a disciple, their fullness as a child of God.

So no this wasn't the best sermon ever. But I do hope it was the best I could offer you given the week and study and conversations where I dwelled with and in the text on behalf of this community. To those thinking, who does he think he is?! I'll tell you – I am nothing more or less than what God by God's grace allows me to be and I have a heart that you might recognize that about yourselves too. Like the sign out front offers: Can looking at it differently help you to differently see? And am I worried about a place called H – E – double hockey sticks? Not particularly as Jesus wins, love wins and fear and condemnation for their falseness ultimately lose the day.

May we remember those to whom we belong. May we avoid the places that make us the worst versions of ourselves. May we speak truthfully. Not mistaking exaggeration for truth but ardently looking for the kernel that bears the consolation of the Gospel in the midst of chaos. Brothers and sisters in Christ, because of who God is – we can live in a sure and certain confidence of the gift of grace. Lay your fears and cares down. Look up at God who is lovingly looking at you⁸ *and* your neighbor and be at peace. Amen.

⁸ Rooted in the phrase of Anthony de Mello, "Behold the one beholding you and smiling." Found in Fthr. Gregory Boyle's excellent book Tattoos on the Heart.