

The Rev. Gabriel Lawrence  
Pentecost 19, Year C  
October 19, 2025  
St. Paul's, Cleveland Heights, OH

Jeremiah 31:27-34  
Psalm 119:97-104  
2 Timothy 3:14-4:5  
Luke 18:1-8

As I read the texts assigned to this day, the 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, I felt a bit of *déjà vu*. Just three weeks ago, in the sermon I preached on the 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, we had a reading from the prophet Jeremiah, from a letter from Paul to Timothy, and an account of the Gospel from Luke. And here we are again: Jeremiah, 2 Timothy, and Luke. In a parish like St Paul's, a preacher rarely gets to preach two Sundays in a row. So, if you'll indulge me, I want to take advantage of the texts for today being continuations of the texts for the sermon I preached three weeks ago and offer a "part two", or a sequel from my sermon a few weeks back.

In case you missed it or need a reminder, here were the main points of part one: In God alone is our hope, and we saw this in the actions of the prophet Jeremiah, who, even though his homeland was threatened by invaders, purchased property as an act of faith, hoping in God's protection and salvation. We also heard in Paul's first letter to Timothy how central to our faith is clinging to the hope of things that are eternal, the things that will outlast us and build up God's Kingdom- righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. And finally, we learned from Luke's Gospel that, if hope is a gift of our faith, that we are to inspire that gift in others. We are to make this place, our sacred space, a place of hope for all who enter here.

Okay, so now that we are all caught up, let's take a dive into today's texts, which, I believe, amplify the theme of hope that we heard three weeks ago. I mentioned in that sermon that, not only are direct, biting words sometimes used in the prophetic tradition to get our attention (and we heard some of those today!), but hope is also part of the tradition. God does not hold us to account without also reminding us of God's own never-failing faithfulness and love. We hear Jeremiah tell us that God will make a new covenant with God's people. He says, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more." We hear God promise God's people that there will come a time where access to knowledge about God will widen, will expand beyond those who are the traditional "keepers of the faith". God will write God's love and law on the hearts of all. God promises in these words a relationship with God's self, access to God's love that is not protected by dogma or doctrine or rules or tradition or hierarchy. God will be our God, and we shall be God's people. Our hope shall be found in God who is not some distant figure who demands our worship and attention, but our hope is in our God who knows the very number of hairs on our heads, knows our fears and joys, our anxieties and traumas and gifts and talents and hopes and dreams. Our hope is in THAT God who loves us and calls us by name.

And this hope in God is not just a signing-on to a life of faith that is always comfortable or even peaceful. If we get a passionate, inspiring call to hope in God in the words of Jeremiah, we also get a dose of reality from Paul's words to Timothy. For what need do we have for hope if everything in our lives is always rolling along smoothly, void of any conflict or pain? As Paul reminds Timothy, so he reminds us that this faith to which we have been called will be an active one as we are to be sober (that is to be alert, to have a clear mind and exercise self-control). We are to endure suffering (that is, suffering is not something to be avoided, but to be expected. No human has ever lived who has avoided suffering). We are to "do the work of an evangelist" (that is, to share our faith. Share God's love. Inspire hope

in others. Build up God's Kingdom.) Paul warns us that there will be consequences to our living out our faith. As a hymn text says, "those whose hearts are attuned to strife will refuse love's overture." That is sometimes the reality of the world in which we live and move and have our being. And yet, we Build up God's Kingdom anyway.

Finally, in Luke's Gospel, we get this story that is sometimes called the Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge". I, however, like the title that someone in Bible Study gave it this week- "The Parable of the Squeaky Wheel." In the story, we hear about this widow who is persistent in asking for justice. It is eventually awarded to her, and so the lesson usually lifted out of the text is the importance of persistence. And I think this is definitely something we can take from this story. But I want us to zoom in on another person in the story: the judge. We are told that he had no fear of God or respect for anyone. And while this may be a detail that Luke added that we might be tempted to look over or just see as a point of humor, I think it is central to the story. And here's why: our conventional human wisdom often tells us that only certain people can bring about good in the world, that only certain political parties or institutions or really good or really smart people can really effect change or do good or save us.

And yet, in this story, Jesus, as he often did, swoops into our conventional wisdom and turns it upside down. This judge did not fear God or respect anyone. And so, we might quickly right off any possibility of this judge being able to do anything good or just or show compassion. And yet, in this story, Jesus tells us that it is precisely the unjust judge who does the just thing and enacts justice. And here is where our hope is in this: God's love and justice will always transcend our conventional wisdom, the people and institutions that we place our faith in which so often fail us and fail to save us. Our hope is in God's salvation and God's justice which can be enacted and incarnated in bounds or out of bounds. God's loving and just actions in our world are not bound by us and can be accomplished in any way God sees fit. God's showing up in the world around us is often a surprise, for God shows up many times in the places and people we least expect. Our hope is in our God who, thanks be to God, both transcends and fills all things.

God of hope, remind us that you are always with us. You never leave us or forsake us. And you are especially with us on the days when our faith demands more sacrifice and suffering from us than smiles. You plant in our hearts hope that is transcendent and all-encompassing. Your peace and grace and love are in constant supply if only we will see it and reach out for it. God of hope, full us this day and evermore. Amen.