

18th Sunday after Pentecost (B) or 18 Pentecost B

Proverbs 31

Psalm 1

?

?

James 3-4

Mark 9:30-37

- many shapes of obedience
- precise contours of loyal life vary
- four scenarios of obedience
- how we respond to grace
- Proverbs provides valuable insights into God's intentions for humanity
- other texts disturbing pattern
 - o sharp either/or choices
 - o what about ambiguity?
- Psalm 1
 - o either way of sinners or delight in Torah
- James 3-4
 - o two kinds of wisdom
 - o (1) envy, ambition, deceit
 - o (2) peacefulness, gentleness, mercy
 - mutually exclusive
- Mark 9
 - o who will be greatest?
 - o Jesus places little child ~ the least
- is ours time of sharp choices? is our discomfort sign of unwillingness to obey God?

Proverbs 31, Texts for Preaching year B

- other passages and the "good wife"
- 22 verse acrostic
- wisdom seems to lie behind the text
- verse 27 and *Sophia*
 - o צופיה הליכות ביתה וְלָחֶם עֲצָלוֹת לֹא תֹאכֵל:
- helps establish setting and date
- embraces role of women we reject today
- woman valued in terms of worth to husband

- exceptions = Esther, Susanna, Huldah
- yes both testaments sow seed for equality
- best approach = avoid this text
- she concentrates on manual labor
- husband on intellectual pursuits
- select another passages from Proverbs (Rw – oh come on... deal with this text!)

Proverbs 31, Leo Perdue, Interpretation

- 8th collection
- probably post-exilic wisdom text from Judah (Rw – seriously? what about dialectal features? double check)
- royal attributes
- household as major institution
- no reference to larger social framework
- reflects Babylonian or Persian colony
- household
- (1) most rural and agrarian
 - multigenerational
- (2) economic
 - members contribute to subsistence
 - excess -> college industries and trade
- (3) solidarity derives from interdependence
 - responsible for each other
 - household > individual
 - also extended to “marginals” (employees, servants)
- (4) religion
 - God’s election of founding ancestors
 - basis of household traditions
 - Proverbs introduces new theological basis
 - God as Creator and Sustainer of cosmos
 - of family and individual
- (5) care for the poor carried out by networks of families
 - competition with allegiance to royalty
- *eshet hayil*
 - strength, wealth, ability (moral worth)
 - primarily the third
- acrostic or mnemonic device

- teaches alphabet
- literary device expected of scribes
- common in sapiential literature of wisdom psalms
- no marking of literary structure
 - “synthetic sayings of one line, 2nd half extends thought of the 1st”
- largely economic text
 - also reproduction, nurture education, judicial
- economic setting + activities dominate poem
 - husband, children, servant-girls
 - large + affluent family
 - senior woman as manager of household
 - resources beyond the family’s flocks + crops
 - linen (significant wealth)
- also purchasing fields, planting, food preparation
 - engages in labor + industry
- Proverbs opens with woman wisdom
- teaching ([Proverbs 1:8, 6:20](#))
 - wisdom of sages
 - how to labor
 - be mom + wives
 - use of language
 - law of kindness (*hesed*) (Rw – like law of love in James 2?)
 - customs, values, religious beliefs
 - woman as teacher of cosmic wisdom
 - [Proverbs 1:20-33](#)
 - [10:1, 15:20, 20:20, 23:22, 25, 28:24, 30:11, 17](#)
- husband known and respected as elder of the land
- “people of the land”
- interests of agrarian communities
- praise lasted beyond her lifetime
 - household = living + deceased
- conclusion
 - probably early post-exilic
 - after monarchies of Israel + Judah ended
 - nobles but not rulers
 - wealthy household
 - admiration even emulation from middle class
 - poor existed on their charity
- theology
 - incarnation of wisdom in female form

- “fear of Yhwh”
- wealth, wisdom, success, because of her faith
- beginning of wisdom = God as Creator + Sustainer

Mark 9, Texts for Preaching year B

- role played by disciples in Mark
- called, commissioned, privileged
- yet still stumble
- failure and misunderstanding
- issue = they become mirrors in which readers see ourselves
- set minds on human things not divine ([8:33](#))
- discouraged? yet reclaimed after the resurrection
- second passion prediction
- followed by teachings on discipleship
- three features of disciples
- (1) singled out for instruction even after failure
 - last scene Jesus rebuked them!
 - much of Jesus’ instruction is not general truths universally applicable to people of all circumstances
 - intended for followers called, commissioned, still bound as community
 - who teaches is not spiritual guru
 - rather the Lord who singled out for instruction
- (2) disciples also baffled
 - they understand enough to know their argument is out of sync with Jesus
- (3) taught lesson in servanthood
 - cross, deny -> more specificity here
 - “greatness” is redefined
 - new categories of success and failure
 - inkling of what “divine thoughts” means
 - attention to “least of these” such that we become least
 - child -> emphasizes lowly status
 - under authority, had no rights
 - forges a chain of relationships
 - welcome child -> Jesus -> God who sent
 - fellowship of hospitality established
 - that opens arms to the powerless

Mark 9, Lamar Williamson, Interpretation

- what does it mean to follow Jesus?
- addressed in second passion prediction
 - enlarged by proverbs for disciples
- teaching of Jesus challenges human assumption
- cuts across patterns of behavior
- text
 - see page 5 for passage in discipleship section
 - limits define by geography
 - last Galilee scene
 - introduces teaching on discipleship
 - setting 30-31a
 - 2nd passion unit 31b-37
 - discipleship 33-37
 - proverbs 38-50
 - causes of sin 43-48
 - conclusion: salty Christians 49-50
- 30-37 = basic unit
- setting
 - Galilee – place where Jesus calls people to follow
 - return + watch for his return
 - leads them through
 - speaks of us
 - Jesus’ concern that people not know where he is (Rw – so?)
 - care for flock > compassion for crowd
 - moment of withdrawal to help disciples understand
 - they are not service itself
 - the trip is the teaching
- prediction
 - briefest? oldest? passion prediction
 - yet most sweeping
 - all humankind is implicated
 - “delivered”
 - divine necessity
 - also their inevitable experience in service of the gospel
- misunderstanding
 - “misunderstanding” theme see pages 14-15
- instructions on discipleship

- Capernaum brings them back home
- “house” = special instructions
- Jesus asks for explanation
- “discuss” implies private
- existential misunderstanding
 - they follow Jesus outwardly
- challenges them on true greatness
- three fold formula
 - 1. “sat down” = formal instruction
 - 2. “called...” = teaching leaders of the disciples
 - 3. “and he said” = climactic saying
- “first and last” = important expansion over first passion prediction
- measures greatness by lowly service
- radically challenges assumptions on achievement
- acted parable
 - recognizes child of low esteem in Greco-Roman world
 - “child” ~ suffering servant ([Isaiah 53:2 LXX](#))
 - ἀνηγγείλαμεν ἐναντίον αὐτοῦ ὡς παιδίον ὡς ῥίζα ἐν γῆ
διψώση οὐκ ἔστιν εἶδος αὐτῷ οὐδὲ δόξα καὶ εἶδομεν αὐτόν
καὶ οὐκ εἶχεν εἶδος οὐδὲ κάλλος (Isa 53:2 BGT)
 - Jesus self-identifies as lowly, least, servant
- Mark does not say “be like children”
 - shifts to receive child in name of Jesus
 - pronounces a blessing understood by all who work with and care for children (Rw – elaborate?)
 - symbolically = “child” ~ anyone who needs help, especially new disciples

Mark 9, Pheme Perkins, New Interpreter’s Bible

- despite showing his power in previous scene Jesus still must suffer
- Galilee -> Jerusalem = time for instructing disciples
- passion predictions followed by instruction
- disciples show they do not understand
- from “be killed by” to “they will kill”
 - signals passion narrative
- fear plays a role
- gospel of Mark ends in fear and silence
- now their lack of perception

- now Jesus asks disciples
- silence shows they understand what they discuss is not fitting
- two independent sayings
 - he does know
 - (Rw – compare Genesis 3 and question of God)
 - authoritative word about rank
- (1) reversal of values and status in the kingdom
- (2) more surprising
 - child in antiquity = non-person
 - should be with the women!
 - receive Jesus / receive God – we understand that
 - but male disciples receive a child?!?
 - little mention of children in Roman authors
 - until they reach puberty/adulthood
- child as stand-in for Jesus
 - who will represent Jesus?
 - “last and servant” -> his self-offering for all
- receive the child in my name
 - later cast out demons in his name
 - receive someone as inconsequential as a child
 - compare [Matthew 10:40b](#)
 - lesson about hospitality directed toward disciples

Reflections

- greatness in kingdom overturns usual perceptions
- challenge to think as God does
- radical acceptance of others as basis of Christian ethics
 - every human being as one to whom Jesus and God relate
 - treat people – even those we help – with dignity
- social conventions regarding children today
- made children accepted in early communities? (mentions of children in gospels) ([1 Timothy 4:12](#))
- have North Americans lost desire to make well-being a central concern
- how we treat youngest and least measures our discipleship

Proverbs 31, Raymond van Leeuwen, New Interpreter’s Bible

- great wisdom hymn praising “capable woman/wife”

- counterpart to capable man
- wise competence + vigor
- compare [Psalm 112](#) also acrostic
- woman's wise energetic activity
- full of action words
 - o her works praise her
 - o *hayil* links two sections of Proverbs 31
 - o also linked by care for the poor that both king and capable woman exhibit
 - o (Rw – so 1st poem focuses on King Lemuel = [Proverbs 31:1-9](#))
- *eshet hayil* in [Proverbs 31:10](#), [12:4](#), [Ruth 3:11](#)
- 31:10 picks up finding wife + wisdom
 - o chapters 1-9
 - o Jewish husbands recite every Sabbath
 - o links to wisdom elsewhere and here
- 31:11-12 good she does for her husband
 - o addressed primarily to young men
 - o wise husband trusts in his wife
 - o woman as warrior who brings home spoil
- 31:13-20 details her great industry
 - o competence and acquisition + provision
 - o symbols of industry intelligence glory
 - o wisdom builds + supplies her house
 - o capable woman builds fills house with good
- 31:14 encompasses all creation
 - o 14b turns acquire to providing
- 31:15 provisions for house
 - o anticipates nocturnal activity
 - o important links to Proverbs
 - o *hoq* as portions
 - o compare Lady Wisdom in [9:3](#)
- 31:16 like general who conquers and subdues
 - o turning rocky highland into a vineyard!?! very hard work
 - o she masters the earth
 - o (Rw – so fulfillment of creational commands)
 - o commerce + creation -> prosperity
- 31:17 masculine image for warfare
- 31:18 language of Lady Wisdom
 - o her merchandise is good ~ profitable in [3:14](#)
 - o she tastes

- up early
- adequate oil for lamps -> provision and wise virgins
- 31:19-20 chiasmic couplet and heart of the poem ***
 - she uses... to produce + provide for the needy
 - links to King Lemuel ([31:9](#))
- 31:21-31 “no fear... fears the Lord”
- 31:21-25 her provision for her house
 - makes clothing she makes, sells, wears
 - *marbaddim* -> [7:16](#) wealthy adulteress
 - why mention husband?
 - household in clothing of status + glory
 - Exodus 28:3 making garments of glory
 - indicates wise heart and spirit of wisdom
 - “linen” conveys splendor
 - metaphorical clothing
 - also used for king and Yhwh
- 31:26 center of 2nd half of poem
 - wisdom in speech as well as actions
 - ~ King Lemuel ([31:8-9](#))
 - *torat hesed* only here (!)
- 31:27 bilingual pun
 - ways of her house are wisdom
 - “idleness will not eat bread”
- 31:28-31 those who praise her and invitation to praise
 - she is source of blessing ~ Wisdom ([3:13-18](#))
 - children as works?
 - husband praises her with language used for Yhwh
 - “do noble things” = wealth or heroism
 - compare [Ruth 4:11](#)
 - “you surpass” often for military activity
 - contrasts with praising a woman for her beauty/physical appeal
 - she fears the Lord
 - “gives coherence wholeness meaning”
 - grand envelope structure (1-9, 31)
 - on theological key = *yir'at yhwh*
 - word play in 31 *t-n-h* as “extol, praise” (or *give*)
 - and also “give her a share”
 - “human parallel to cosmic praise that Yhwh’s works offer him” ([Psalm 145:10](#))

Reflections

- (1) strange woman in 1-9 here drink + women
 - can damage the king
 - warning to men who indulge sexually
 - men should not fear women but their own disordered passions
 - to blame the object of desire is to project
- (2) fear of Lord while discussing mundane activities?
 - wisdom + fear expressed in worldly activity
 - no sacred-secular split
 - all of human life + action manifest reverence + obedience to God and harmony with cosmic order
 - when we sever one from the other we get confused worship, degradation of creation ([Romans 1](#))
- (3) great lady, wealthy, aristocratic
 - the ideals she embodies not only for upper classes
- (4) masculine images to praise her
 - praise of women alters errant male perceptions