

May 20, 2018
Lesson 12: Remembering With Joy
Scripture: Leviticus 25: 1-12

Context:

Our series continues to focus on being generous to God by continuing with the book of Leviticus. In today's text we are introduced to more rules and laws concerning the Sabbath and something called Jubilee. As this comes in in the latter part of Leviticus, we are going into the prescriptions given to the Israelites and the Holiness Code to guide the people.

The setting according to the text is when Moses is on Mount Sinai and God is giving Moses everything that the people are to focus in their journey with God as they enter the Promised Land. Once they arrive there they are to cultivate the land, bringing about the crops and vineyards to sustain the people. Yet every seventh year, there is to be a rest across the land. The people are to consume the food, but not plant anything else. There is the command to enjoy the bounty they have already taken during the previous seven years.

The cycle is to continue for seven seven-year cycles, which culminate in the fiftieth year with a celebration called Jubilee to take place on the tenth day of the seventh month. What follows is the Day of Reconciliation or Day of Purification. On this day, a shofar is blown throughout the land and people are to celebrate liberty.¹ Those who have lost property can return home and celebrate with their family in the abundance that is there. It is to be a year of celebration and thanksgiving for all the blessings that God has given the people.

The rest of the chapter follows with commands for how Jubilee is to be celebrated. Those who have been forced to mortgage their lands are allowed to return home to reclaim their homes and the debt is canceled.² Sellers are required to look at their books and make sure they are not overcharging or being unfair when it comes to prices for the harvest or other goods.³ Jubilee is a time when people are to see others as humans, those who are all interconnected.

Yet Jubilee also holds a theological belief. The land does not belong to the buyers or the sellers of the property and their harvest; they are all "aliens" and "tenants" of the land.⁴ They are to be custodians of the land because according to God, "the land is mine."⁵ The year of Jubilee is to remind the Israelites that their blessings are not their own; they are from God who have given all people life. Jubilee reminds them to celebrate what God has given them and to also share with those around them. As the stewards of

¹ Samuel E. Balentine, "Leviticus," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY 2002), 195.

² Ibid., 195.

³ Ibid., 195.

⁴ Ibid., 195.

⁵ Lev. 25:23., NRSV.

the Promised Land who are there for the promise of liberty and freedom for all, Israel is called to provide for its redemption.⁶

Application:

The year of Jubilee was to be a major event in the life of the Israelites. There was nothing quite like it in other ancient cultures. It might be harder for us to imagine Jubilee on our terms in today's world. We do not live in an agricultural society focusing primarily on harvest cycles.

We do live in a world though that is incredibly busy. From year to year, week-to-week, day-to-day, we are constantly busy. The more I listen to people talk, the more I realized how over-programmed we have become as a society. We see it with our work schedules, our children's school schedules, and even sometimes in the life of the church. We program our selves to death to make sure everything is crammed in. During the year of Jubilee, there was an intentional slowing down of the calendar. People were to spend time enjoying the harvest and the people that they connect with the most. I hope that as the summer approaches that both laity and clergy are thinking about those mini Jubilees that need to take place in their lives. The summer is the time for there sometimes to be spontaneity, time specifically for loved ones, and opportunities to unplug and get lost in doing things for one's self and soul. Where on your schedule is there room for a Jubilee, a time for rejuvenation and celebration of the life that the Lord has given you?

Jubilee also speaks to something else though. The year of Jubilee is a time of reconciliation of forgiving debts and trespasses. Most of the scripture applies to business transactions in which sometimes people were not fair. Just as the economy surges up and down, so do our personal lives. There are times where we hold grudges or we do not move past transgressions that have happened. While boundaries are important for people who have hurt us, there is also a point where if not careful, we can be consumed with not forgiving people. Eventually though, that unforgiving feeling or grudge affects us more than the person who committed the trespass. We begin to internalize our anger and soon we are the ones who cannot move on. *They* do not steal our joy, *we* steal our own joy as we spend time worrying or internally fuming. We could only be happy if they had not done this or that, or ruined our life in this or that way. *We* allow them to be the ones to hold the keys to *our* joy and happiness. My grandmother once had a saying that I found true: "You are the only person who you can make happy. You cannot depend on another person for it. Remember that always in your relationships and friendships."

So at times something happens and we feud or feel slighted by someone. It is hard work, but the best outcome comes from forgiving that person and moving on. It might be time for a renewed relationship with them or a parting of ways in which both parties are respected. Whatever the case, practicing Jubilee means looking at the world and people in a different light or perspective. Just as God forgives us for our many debts and transgressions, we are to respond to others with the same forgiveness. Who knows, people may even be actively seeking that forgiveness from you to move on to something else or to a different place in life.

⁶ Lev. 25: 24., NRSV.

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh
Associate Pastor
First United Methodist Church
1380 W. Main St.
Dothan, AL 36301
Office (334) 793-3555 ext. 240
E-mail: hunter@fumcdothan.org

