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May 6th: Deuteronomy 7 & Luke 5:1-16

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No covenants with the peoples of the land. Jesus calls Simon.

Some passages referenced:

Exodus 34:12-16 (warning against covenants, idolatry, and intermarriage with the peoples of the land); Genesis 34:9-10 (proposal of intermarriage with the Hivites); Genesis 34:30 (Jacob's fear on account of his small numbers); Genesis 35:2-5 (eschewing idolatry and God causing the peoples to fear); Genesis 34:25-29 (despoiling Shechem); Genesis 22:15-18 (Abraham blessed because he obeyed God's voice); Deuteronomy 9:4-5 (Israel not given the land because of their righteousness); Genesis 18:17-19 (Abraham's obedience as a means by which God fulfils his purpose, but not the basis of his call).

Isaiah 6:5-7 (Isaiah's awareness of his sin and his cleansing); Jeremiah 16:15-16 (fishers of men); 1 Kings 19:19-21 (the call of Elisha); John 21:1-14 (the miraculous catch of fish repeated at Peter's restoration to his calling).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

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Deuteronomy 7 Deuteronomy 7 into great confusion until they are destroyed. And he will give their kings into your hand, and you shall make their name perish from under heaven. No one shall be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them.

The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire. You shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them, or take it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared by it, for it is an abomination to the Lord your God. And you shall not bring an abominable thing into your house, and become devoted to destruction like it.

You shall utterly detest and abhor it, for it is devoted to destruction. Deuteronomy chapter 7 is a chapter that concerns in large measure Israel's relationship to the other nations of the land of Canaan. The Lord will clear out the nations before them, these seven nations that are greater and more powerful than they are.

And there is a serious warning against intermarriage. Now when we think about intermarriage we are often thinking about two individuals coming together and their individual ancestry. But that isn't the emphasis here.

Rather it's about joining families and intermingling peoples. For our understanding of marriage it's very much two detached persons. But within that culture it's a greater bringing together of peoples.

And so the intermarriage would be forging a bond between peoples, not just between isolated individuals who have a romantic attachment. Israel seems to face a real temptation to intermarriage. Why is that the case? We could maybe suppose that it's about the romantic attraction between two individuals that fall in love.

One happens to be a Midianite, one happens to be an Israelite or something. And the star-crossed lovers are chafing at the restrictions that prevent them from coming together. Now that may be part of it but I think there's more going on here.

There is a temptation to intermarry because Israel is a small nation. And if you're a small nation one of the ways that you develop strength is by strategic alliances, by joining families and intermingling peoples. And along with this would be the natural accompaniment of making covenants with them and having religious syncretism as a part of that.

They would serve their gods, they would make treaties with them and then they would intermarry with them and they would become one mingled people. There is an example of just this taking place of course in Numbers chapter 25 in the relationship with the Moabite women and the Midianite women. There is also a warning against it in Exodus

chapter 34 verses 12 to 16.

The warning here shows that alliances with people in the land, worshipping their gods and marrying their daughters and their sons all go together. If you engage in the covenant-making these other things will tend to follow quite naturally. Daniel Lowenstein observes that there is a parallel with this of course in Genesis chapter 34.

Genesis chapter 34 verses 9 to 10. This is the invitation of Hamel. This is an attractive offer.

If you're someone who's wandering around from place to place who doesn't have great power or great numbers then you could get security by marrying into one of these established groups and it would enable both of them to be stronger for the alliance. The marriages then were the means of knitting peoples together, of intermingling peoples and along with the alliance-making and the intermarriage came the worshipping of the other's gods. That syncretism that brought together two cultures, two peoples in the worship of the idols of each other.

After the actions of Simeon and Levi in destroying Shechem, Jacob says to them you have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. My numbers are few and if they gather themselves against me and attack me I shall be destroyed, both I and my household. The temptation for someone in that position is to intermarry and appreciating the weakness of his position and how easily he could be preyed upon by others, Jacob was prepared to make some sort of treaty with the people of Shechem and that treaty was one that involved them getting circumcised but that circumcision did not seem to be arising out of a deep commitment to the worship and serving of the Lord, it was a sort of religious syncretism and the danger of course was that the syncretism went in two directions.

In the next chapter we read a very instructive passage. So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments, then let us arise and go up to Bethel so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone. So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had and the rings that were in their ears.

Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem and as they journeyed a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. Jacob is aware of how small he is in numbers and the need to make these sorts of strategic alliances with the people in the land. However the result of this is a sort of syncretism.

They have all these foreign gods, whether these idols were taken just in the day to day interacting with the people of the land or in the plundering of the city that we see at the

end of chapter 34. In both of these acts Jacob's household was snared in idolatry. However as they cut off those idols and completely removed themselves from the worship of the people of the land and distinguished themselves as a people, not forming these sorts of entangling alliances, God puts a terror upon the cities round about them so that they are not attacked.

And a similar thing seems to be going on here. They must completely dissociate themselves, completely reject the Canaanites and their ways. They must beware of appropriating their gods and their property.

If they defeat a city they must not take the spoil because the spoil as it was for Jacob's sons seems to have been a snare and they take the idols and they start to worship the idols. Rather they are to be a people holy to the Lord, a people dwelling alone, not a people who are mixed in with the nations because they fear them defeating them. The story of Genesis chapter 34 is a despoiling of the Hivites and at the end he talks about his fear of the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

These are nations that are mentioned at the beginning of this chapter and so the parallels between these stories would have been apparent to people who are reading this. Where else do we find a story of the Israelites completely destroying a city of the people of the land? It's in Genesis 34. And this plunder seems to have become a snare to them.

This was a pattern that the Israelites as they went into the promised land should not follow. They should learn from the failures of Jacob but also from the failures of Simeon and Levi. Jacob failed by not keeping the people holy to the Lord, by making a covenant with the people of the land that would lead to intermingling.

And Simeon and Levi failed by again not keeping themselves holy, by taking things from the city that ended up trapping them in and their people in the sin of idolatry. The snare of plunder must be avoided and so they must bury the spoil if they are to escape. They are to be a people holy to the Lord.

The Lord did not choose them because they were great in number. The Lord knows that they are few and the Lord will protect them as such. They must fear the Lord and be faithful to him rather than fearing the nations of the land.

The Lord will put his terror in them and protect them just as he did Jacob their forefather. The Lord set his love upon them. They didn't do anything to deserve it.

He promised to their forefathers and he delivered them from Egypt. Rather than engaging in strategic alliance making, they need to be faithful to the Lord. That is the covenant that will pull them through.

Not the covenants that they will make in a shrewd way to gain favour with the people of

the land. It will be by cleaving to the Lord and not departing from him in any way. Why is God giving them the land? Verse 12 gives us an answer.

Now this should remind us of something that we've heard elsewhere earlier on in the story. It's the statement that God makes to Abraham after his sacrifice of Isaac or his preparedness to sacrifice Isaac. God declares the Lord.

It's a similar sort of statement. These two statements seem to make the blessing of God contingent upon the faithfulness of the person who's being blessed. But there seems to be an apparent tension.

The Lord here seems to suggest that they enter the land because they observe his rules. But just two chapters later we read. That's Deuteronomy chapter 9 verses 4 to 5. And here it seems in contrast to chapter 7 verse 12.

The answer is. The purpose and the promise is fulfilled. And we see something of the logic of this in Genesis chapter 18 verses 17 to 19.

The logic there is that God chose Abraham to bless all of the nations in the earth. He chose him for that purpose. He didn't choose him because of anything in Abraham that merited being chosen.

However the blessing that God promised to Abraham that he would experience himself and the blessing that he would be to others will be achieved through Abraham's faithfulness. And God is going to form that faithfulness in Abraham so that God will bring to pass through Abraham what he always intended. Now what does this mean for Israel? It means that the land is not a reward that God is giving them.

No it's part of their mission. God has chosen Israel so that there will be a light to the nations. A blessing to the people that have been cursed at Babel.

He's going to drive out nations before them. But not because Israel is great. But because his purpose in Israel requires that they have the land.

The land is a tool for them to achieve the purpose for which he has called them. And so that blessing of the land is part of the way in which the promise is going to be fulfilled. Part of the way in which God is going to bring his light to the nations round about and finally to the whole world.

They are instructed to consume the peoples of the land. They must remember the lessons of the Exodus and not be afraid of any of them. The Lord fights for them.

The Lord fought for them in the events of the plagues and the Lord will fight for them again in a similar manner. He'll clear out the nations bit by bit so that they can take possession as they have the ability to do so. He won't do it in a sudden swoop.

Rather as they rise in faithfulness and their capacity for taking rule in the land, God will drive out the people as they grow. And the work of defeating, destroying these nations will not primarily be done by them. It will be done by the Lord who fights for them.

What this actually looked like in practice is not entirely clear. We should not presume that it would just be a matter of them falling by the sword. When they do take over the land, they must beware at every step not to give in to the temptation of syncretism.

Not to take the plunder of the cities and fall into the snare of idolatry. They must be holy to the Lord and it's that bond with the Lord that drives all of this mission. The holiness that they must express.

The wickedness that they must completely detest and reject. And the way in which God will bless them as they take that route over others. This will be the means by which God's purpose for his people will be accomplished.

A question to consider. What are some of the ways in which we can compromise our holiness as the people of God through dangerous entanglements that we enter into through fear? Luke chapter 5 verses 1 to 16. On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret.

And he saw two boats by the lake. But the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land.

And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch. And Simon answered, Master, we toiled all night and took nothing.

But at your word, I will let down the nets. And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them.

And they came and filled both the boats so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken.

And so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching men.

And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.

And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, I will. Be clean. And immediately the leprosy left him.

And he charged him to tell no one, But go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them. But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.

Jesus begins Luke chapter 5 by teaching by the side of Lake Gennesaret. He goes into a boat and teaches from just off the shore. Within the book of Luke, it is always the lake of Gennesaret.

In the other Gospels we read about the Sea of Galilee or the Sea of Tiberias, whereas it tends to be lake throughout the Gospel of Luke. Why the difference? In Mark, for instance, a great deal is made of the sea stories, the way in which Christ proves his power on the seas and demonstrates his glory to his disciples. In Luke, however, there is a sea, but the sea is found in the second volume of his work, in the book of Acts.

I think it's likely that Luke refers to the Sea of Galilee as the Lake of Gennesaret to hold some of that energy back until the book of Acts, where we will reach the sea, as Paul finally goes to Rome. This is because the sea is associated with the Gentiles. In the Old Testament there aren't many stories of the sea at all.

We have stories of the land, of shepherds and sheep. There are only really two boat stories. The first, of course, is the story of the ark and Noah, and the second is the story of Jonah and the big fish.

Both of these stories involve a more cosmic frame. In Noah it's the whole world that's being judged, and in the case of Jonah he's sent to a Gentile people with a message from God. The boat is Simon's, and the boat is moved out a bit from the land, and Jesus teaches from it.

After the end of his teaching he instructs Simon to put out into the deep and let down his nets for a catch. And he catches such a great multitude of fish that the net almost breaks. He needs to be assisted by people in other boats, but the number of fish is so great that the boats themselves are almost sinking.

Simon has others with him, but the narrative throughout is closely focused upon him as an individual. Simon Peter, it's the first time in the Gospel that he's called Peter, is aware that he has been part of a miracle. Jesus is no ordinary man.

Simon is instantly, acutely aware of his own sinfulness. He's responding to a theophanic event, an event in which the glory of God is displayed in physical manifestations. The power and the holiness of God reveal our own sinfulness by contrast.

Many see doctrines that highlight human sinfulness as arising from a pessimistic view of man. And what they fail to see is that more often than not they find their origin in a glorious vision of God. It's as we see God's holiness that we truly perceive our own sinfulness.

The dazzling radiance of the Lord's glory reveals the grubby, grimy and ugly pollution of human sinfulness. What's taking place here is reminiscent of the commissioning of the prophet Isaiah. When Isaiah sees the glorious vision of the Lord in the temple, his response is, It's Isaiah chapter 6 verse 5. And that response to a theophany is the same sort of thing that Peter is having here.

The response of God in that instance is to send a seraphim with a coal from the altar. He touches the mouth of Isaiah and says, And there is an implicit forgiving of Simon's sin here. He's aware of his sin and Christ tells him not to be afraid.

His sin is forgiven, his guilt is not held against him. And he is going to be, like Isaiah, commissioned with a task to Israel. He is told that he will be a fisher of men.

The Gentiles as dwellers in the sea could be thought of as fish. Also, it's a way of thinking about those who are exiled, those who have been driven out of the land. Jeremiah chapter 16 verses 15 to 16 is a previous use of the language of fishers in relationship to gathering human beings.

Behold, I am sending for many fishers, declares the Lord, and they shall catch them. And afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill and out of the clefts of the rock. God is going to gather his people.

And one of the means by which he's going to do that is sending fishermen after them. Jesus calls his disciples much as Elijah calls Elisha in 1 Kings chapter 19 verses 19 to 21. In that passage, Elisha is engaged in a symbolically important task.

And in a similar way, Simon's task and the miracle that is performed is a manifestation of his later calling. 1 Kings chapter 19 2 And then I will follow you. And he said to him, Go back again, for what have I done to you? 3 And he returned from following him, and took the yoke of oxen, and sacrificed them, and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen, and gave it to the people, and they ate.

4 Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him. James and John are there with Peter. These are the three core disciples.

They're companions in their former profession, and their former profession prefigures their spiritual calling. Simon has been told to put out into the deep, to leave the land. Simon will lead later on the boat of the church.

The church is like a boat, it's part of the land that has gone out to sea. It's a sign of his

future mission. He will strike out from the land.

He will go to a sea town, to Joppa. As Jonah went to Joppa before heading out to Tarshish, so Peter will be in Joppa where he receives this mission to go to Cornelius. And to go to the Gentiles, and as the Gentiles are brought the gospel of Christ, they will be gathered in.

Peter will fulfill his calling as the fisher of men. The one who leads the church in this primary mission, going out into the deep, leaving the land behind. He will pioneer that, and just as in this occasion he is assisted by his friends, James and John, and his companions and colleagues, they are going to be there assisting him there too.

We should also note the way that this sign is repeated in John chapter 21, when Peter is restored to his calling. Jesus' statement to Simon that from that point on he will be catching men goes to him in particular, but clearly it includes James and John, and presumably also Andrew who is there with them. After this, Jesus heals a leper.

Leprosy in scripture is not what we usually think of as leprosy. That is the condition called Hansen's disease. Rather, leprosy seems to be a type of skin condition, and that skin condition could be seen in part as a judgment of God upon the person.

While it certainly has that connotation in certain parts of the Old Testament though, we should not presume that it is the case every occasion where we meet it. Lepers would generally live away from larger bodies of population, so Jesus probably met the man in a more secluded location, as he is going through deserted areas. Jesus is moved by pity at the man's plight, and he touches him.

It is a means by which some would usually contract impurity, but when Jesus does this he communicates wholeness. This healing doesn't merely deliver the leper from a physical ailment, but it also delivers him from social isolation. He can now become part of the wider people again.

Jesus instructs him not to say anything, and then sends him away. He must present himself to the priest and go through the prescribed process of cleansing. Jesus is immune from catching impurity, but the man must still observe the proper procedure, and this is a proof to the authorities.

Perhaps there is some connotation of judgment there. However, although Jesus instructs the man not to tell anyone, the story seems to be told, and his fame spreads throughout the region. As a result, it is difficult for Jesus to do his work openly in towns anymore.

Rather, he has to go into desolate places, and in these desolate places he spends time in prayer. While we might think of the desolate places as places of communion with nature, of seeing the beauty of God's creation, and of enjoying solitude and communion with God, we should bear in mind the many times in which in the New and the Old Testament,

the wilderness is a place of demonic habitation. Christ may be going to the front line as it were, going to the place where the demons dwell, and engaging in the struggle of prayer.

A question to consider. How might the story of Simon and his encounter with Jesus in the miraculous catch of fish provide a paradigm for Christian experience more generally?