

17 May

**But wait, there's more!**

Acts 1.6-14, 1 Peter 5, John 17.1-11.

Today's sermon did not come to me as a coherent whole but as a 2 for 1 deal, a Bible activity for the congregation and then a shorter, more serious sermon. I don't like to refuse a gift, so here is your activity.

1 Peter is a letter from the Christian tradition, most likely in Rome, which was often referred to as Babylon, like New York is the Big Apple, but less flattering to be called Babylon. The letter is for the dispersed Christians in Asia Minor, to encourage and strengthen them.

Here, in this chapter, they are told to be shepherds of the flock, be eager to serve, be examples, be humble, cast all your cares on God and stand firm in the faith. That is advice that we can all take.

I am just going to introduce you to an interesting word, the first word in verse 13, *She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.*

It talks about *she* as the one who sends greetings, chosen together with you, i.e. co-elect, or also chosen. We are not told specifically who this is.

OK. Here are some possibilities.

1. Some translators decided that *she* was **a woman who is not named**. Maybe it is Peter's wife or another woman in the church in Rome who knows them and they know her, whether she is named or not. Of the 43 translations I looked at, 18 of them made this choice or something similar. An unnamed woman.
2. Other translators decided that *she* must be a metaphor for **the church**, and the chosen ones are the members of the congregation, so some Bibles say the church sends you greetings, or your sister church sends you greetings. Of the 43 translations I looked at, about half (25) made this choice or similar. *Why sister church and not just church?*  
[ ... ] To match that pesky pronoun *she*.
3. A third possibility is that *she* who sends greetings is, or is with, **a woman who is named**. The word *syneklektē* means chosen together. However, this word might be one word or it might be 2 words joined together. They are joined as one word in most manuscripts, but they are separated in others, notably in the oldest known manuscript. Papyrus 72 (also known as Papyrus Bodmer VIII) is the earliest surviving manuscript that contains this verse. It dates to the 200-300s and has *syn eklektē*.

This manuscript is the oldest surviving copy of 1 and 2 Peter, establishing early circulation of the text of these 2 letters together. The manuscript shows signs of frequent corrections and features *nomina sacra* (abbreviations for sacred words), so there are fix-its and helpful hints throughout.

*Syn* means with or together with, and *eklektē* means chosen or the chosen one. In this context it could also be a name, so *syn eklektē* might mean, together with *Eklektē* (female name meaning chosen).

It may be something of a long shot, but definitely a possibility. You may be aware of how Junia was accepted as an apostle in the letter to the Romans for over 1,000 years.

Translators then changed her name to Junias because they thought it must really have been a man, but after another 700 or so years, they realised they were wrong, changed it back to Junia, and she was recognised again as a woman apostle. The phrase *with Eklektē* as a separate word or name is being talked about by some theologians, but has not yet emerged in mainstream translations of the Bible.

Knowing all this, let's play the game. You are a Bible translator. You are familiar with these 3 possibilities and you know that there is no consensus about what this verse actually says. Here we are in the committee room, and we can't go home tonight until we agree. It might not be unanimous, but we are looking for a strong majority if possible.

The possibilities are :

1. *She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. (NRSV)*

OR, because the word used here for *she* is not actually a pronoun but a feminine definite article, like "the" but used for the feminine, this sentence could be "*The co-elect woman in Babylon greets you, and so does Mark, my son.*"

2. Your **sister church** in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark. (NRSV Anglicised)

3. She who is in Babylon, **with Eclektē** and Mark my son, greets you.

The word order [on your slip of paper/on screen] in Greek is: Greet, you, she, in, Babylon, co-elected [*or with Eklekte*], and, Mark, the, son, of me.

So, let's take a vote: The sentence with the unnamed woman, or the sister church, or the one including the named woman. [ ... ]

If we read our chosen translation and add verse 14 that follows, we will have the end of this letter, [<sup>13</sup>*CHOSEN FORM OF VERSE 13*], <sup>14</sup> *Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.*

1. *She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.*

2. *Your sister church in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark.*

3. *She who is in Babylon, with Eclēctē and Mark my son, greets you.* e.

[Sources re *Eklekte*: [Lincoln H. Blumell](#), [Marg Mowczko](#)]

Let us continue by looking at the reading from Acts and the Gospel reading.

Jesus gives us more than we could ever ask, more than we could ever imagine! The disciples have seen and heard the risen Christ. They have met with him, talked with him, broken bread with him, heard him teach them and pray for them. But now the time has come for Jesus to return to the Father. They are still not sure of all the details of what is to come. They ask about the restoration of Israel as a kingdom, so that things will go back to what they were in the past, but that is not what is ahead.

Jesus tells them that they will not know when the Father decides to act, but it will be with authority and that action will not be restoration, but initiation of something entirely new. Jesus says, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

They hear the words but do not entirely understand what they mean. The day of Pentecost is at hand! Next week we will meet the power and the glory of that day, but for today, we join the disciples in their incomplete understanding but complete trust. They witness the ascension, hear the angels, and return to Jerusalem to gather and pray. Jerusalem is a Sabbath Day’s walk from the Mount of Olives. That is the legal distance you can walk on the Sabbath without it being deemed to be work. It is about 1 km.

They know that they are to spread the news of the resurrection. They are gathered together: Jesus’ family (his mother and brothers, we are told), the women and 11 disciples who will tell this good news. Why 11? [...]

Yes, there is a place for 1 more. They have 2 men in mind. Both men are suitable, but they draw lots to let God decide. Either candidate would be able to carry out what is asked.

Little do they know that God has even bigger plans. Pentecost is coming, and the Holy Spirit will not be confined to 12 men, 1 family and an unspecified number of women. Again, we will leave all that to next week. Can you feel the anticipation rising?

Our Gospel reading begins, “After Jesus said this,” so we need to look at what comes before. The previous verse is, “I have said this to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world, you face persecution, but take courage: I have conquered the world!” Jesus promises peace in a world that is far from peaceful.

So, we continue, “<sup>1a</sup>After Jesus said this, he looked towards heaven and prayed: ‘Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.

<sup>2</sup> For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. <sup>3</sup> Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

The reading continues as a long prayer and conversation with the Father about relationship. This is a closely intertwined relationship that brings together the Father, the Son and all people. Just as the Father gave authority to the Son, Jesus authorises his disciples, protects them and equips them to go out into the world and to bring the people of the world to Jesus and to the Father. When Jesus leaves them, they are not left alone; they are not left without meaning and purpose. They are not left without strength, protection, unity and support, all grounded in the love of the Father, the mission of Jesus, the underpinning of prayer, and the promise of eternal life in the knowledge and love of God.

And there’s even more. Today’s celebration of the Ascension is amazing in its own right, but next week is something else. Jesus’ ascension does not leave the disciples alone because they are left with the promise of the Holy Spirit.

This is a promise that underpins the ascension, reassures the disciples and equips them and all who come after. But that is a story for another day, for next Sunday. It is one of the great days of the church calendar, a day that reminds us that *Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.* (When I Survey the Wondrous Cross)

To finish, let’s go back to Acts 1:8, *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.* May it be so. Amen.