

Sermon Notes Sept 1, 2019 Focus apocry-what? Sirach 10

[Lectionary Readings for September 1](#)

Every once and a while you will hear a scripture being read in church that is not “official” aka deuterocanonical. This is a fancy way of noting that a text is outside the accepted protestant-biblical-collection-of-books known as the Canon of Scripture (settled centuries ago). We occasionally read The Apocrypha in church just to remind you that it is not just your everyday devotional and that it is actually in the bible of our pews!

Even if you don't know a thing about **The Apocrypha**, you can tell when a text from The Apocrypha is being read. At the end of a reading in church, the lector will (hopefully) make this awkward statement: “here ends the reading.” We don't know if we should respond with “thanks be to God” or nothing - nothing is the right answer.

For clarity's sake, “apocryphal” is an adjective broadly meaning hidden. Dan Brown's *The Davinci Code* makes a big deal about suppressed texts which are apocryphal (adj.) For example, the Gospel of Mary is apocryphal, but is not in **The Apocrypha**. The Apocrypha (noun) is a collection of texts that span the 400 year period between the Old Testament and the New Testament (see next page for list)

There are some great stories in The Apocrypha, but they are a little weird. My two favorites are Tobit and Maccabees.

Tobit - In the story, Tobit is a diligent undertaker for his slain countrymen. This practice gains him the ire of an Assyrian king, Sennacherib, who is the one “producing” Tobit's slain compatriots. The king exiles Tobit from his Hebrew homeland. In exile, a bird poops in his eyes and he goes blind! His son, Tobias, then goes on a journey accompanied by an angel.

A series of events leads the son, Tobias, to catch a fish with a magical gallbladder, heart and liver (more later). Tobias meets his future wife Sarah, who had killed off seven previous husbands. Spoiler alert - she's demon possessed. Tobias waits until *after the wedding* before burning the magical heart and liver as incense to drive the demon away. They have lots of parties because the angel / fish healed Sarah; therefore, marital bliss abounds.

Tobit, the dad, regains his sight later and the wedding party just goes and goes. The angel leaves and they live happily ever after. This is a folktale, but it beautifully tackles central human questions:

- Why suffering?
- Who cares if you are righteous?
- Does religious faith even matter?

2 Maccabees - First 1 & 2 Maccabees are the inspiration behind the Jewish festival of Hanukkah (Chanukah). [props to Adam Sandler and this OG version of his Hanukkah song](#). (In the song, he jokingly sings about how Hanukkah is better than Christmas while listing all sorts of different famous people who are Jewish.). The whole of the Maccabees story is about the Jewish people coming together to be victorious in the face of overwhelming opposition.

Chapters 8-10 of 2 Maccabees is a particularly gory story about integrity. This chapter highlights what it means to stand up for your principles. In the story, a Roman ruler, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, arrests a mother with seven sons, They are arrested for keeping kosher. This ruler is so offended by Jewish purity practice that he tortures and murders the sons one by one in front of their mother because they refused to eat pork. She dies too. **“How**



much are your principles worth? is the question that hangs over the story. Their story would inspire Judas Maccabeus to victory (a hero of the Hanukkah story).

Sirach - (not a personal favorite) - The *Book of the All Virtuous Wisdom of Yeshua ben Sirach* is being read today. It is also known as just 'Sirach,' or also Ecclesiasticus. It is not my favorite book in The Apocrypha by a longshot because it kind of reminds me of "chicken soup for the Hebrew soul." It's very pithy, proverbial wisdom meant to encourage. There are some good passages like the one today.

The Apocrypha - I am going to list what shows up in your pew bible (BTW there are variations of "the Apocrypha" in different traditions). Google yourself into the weeds if you want more on this. Here is the pew bible ordering of the apocrypha:

- Tobit - bird poop guy
- Judith - she decapitated Holofernes (lots of artwork on this throughout the centuries)
- Additions to Esther
- Wisdom of Solomon - proverbial style wisdom
- Ecclesiasticus (or Sirach) today's reading
- Baruch (can be read during Easter vigil)
- Letter of Jeremiah
- Additions to the book of Daniel
 - Prayer of Azariah Song of the Three Children
 - Susanna
 - Bell and the Dragon
- Books in Greek and Slavonic - not Roman Catholic canon
 - 1 Maccabees - Adam Sandler
 - Prayer of Manasseh
 - Psalm 151
 - 2 Maccabees - (Adam Sandler's song) as well as 3 and 4 Maccabees

Interfaith note. The Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions do not make a distinction between the "regular" Bible and The Apocrypha - It's all Bible - it's all "protocanonical" (one canon). The Episcopal Church, along with other protestant denominations, try forge a middle way. We don't fully affirm these books on the same level as - for example - The Gospel of Mark. However, we don't reject them either.

In the Episcopal Church, we rarely read these texts in church. We only read Judith, Baruch, Wisdom of Solomon, and Sirach (mostly Sundays, but also Easter Vigil and Mary Magdalene's day). There are a total of 15 readings that come up in the 3 year Sunday lectionary cycle. Then it starts over and we read through the same 15 again. There a couple of choices in weddings and funerals too. If you're itching to know when they're read, go here: <http://www.lectionarypage.net/ReverseLectionary.html>. 80% of these readings come from the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach, with only two from Baruch and one from Judith.

Application - The apocrypha (the minor league team) is an invitation for you to write your own story. You are not expected to be a major league hitter like Mark or John, but just to be willing to share how God's love is in *your* world -- however goofy or random it might be. People have been writing about God for milenia - some great, and some not so great. *Join them* writing your story of God too, maybe even putting pen to paper. You life is a "gospel." As the saying goes, "you might be the only gospel people will read." Lastly, don't feel the need to do this well right away. Anne Lamot, a relatively famous spiritual writer says, we have to write "s...ty first drafts." But, write we must. Do not let whatever deficiencies in your life (perceived or real) prevent you from living and writing boldy your story of God. It won't be all neat and tidy, but the world needs your voice anyway.

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