

Scripture Readings and Sermon

February 17, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Jeremiah 17:5-10 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

This message of curses and blessings takes place within a difficult time for Jeremiah. Jeremiah has faithfully proclaimed God's judgment upon the people only to have them plot against him. In Jeremiah 11:19, Jeremiah is described as a tree with bitter fruit (message of judgment). They plot saying, "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, so that his name will no longer be remembered!" In response, Jeremiah asks God, "Why does the way of the guilty prosper?" for they are plotting against him. Jeremiah reminds God that, "You see me and test me-- my heart is with you". Despite this, when a drought hits the people, Jeremiah pleads for the people in Chapter 14 only to have God remind Jeremiah that false prophets are preaching against him. These themes of drought and curses, tree and blessings, and the purity of heart come together in this passage as God assures Jeremiah that he will survive even when all around him will fall.

Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

The rejection of Jesus' resurrection came from two different sources. The first source was from the "religious" Jews represented by the Pharisees who accepted the belief in the resurrection but only on the last day. Therefore, Jesus' resurrection was rejected due to the fact that he was the only one who was resurrected. The second source, which most likely had a greater influence upon the church in Corinth, was represented by the Sadducees. The Sadducees were a party of the aristocratic priesthood who support Hellenism or Greek philosophy. One strand of Greek philosophy which grew out of Platonism was known as Gnosticism. The Gnostic understanding of divinity was purely spiritual and rejected the material body and therefore a bodily resurrection. Gnosticism embraced the spiritual teachings of Jesus while rejecting the need for physical healing or the sanctity of bodily creation. This blend of the teachings of Jesus and Gnosticism was the earliest and longest lasting heresies in Christianity. It is most likely to this audience that the passage today is addressed.

Commentary on Luke 6:17-26 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

After the call of Simon, James, and John, Luke's story of Jesus continues with several healing stories and the call of Levi. Behind most of these stories is the growing tension between Jesus and the 'official' authorities. Luke then lists all the disciples in verse 12 and provides his shortened version of Matthew's sermon on the mount. The major difference between Matthew's beatitudes and Luke's version is the inclusion of "woes". This inclusion points to what writers have coined the Gospel's tendency to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable". For Luke, those who are too comfortable are deaf to the words of salvation because of their own sense of already being saved. Their prosperity for them is a sign of God's favor rather than an indication of the world's favor. The call of repentance is drowned out by the flattery of man. They are therefore to be pitied because they have chosen short term comfort over a long term salvation.

Sermon Summary (*Youtube [Sermon Video](#)*)

At times it may seem like life is on a continuous roller coaster. A never ending cycle of ups and downs. As the seasons change and life ends and begins, Nature is a constant reminder of this cycle. Even our institutions like politics and business have cycles. Jesus reminds those listening to his sermon that eventually the tables will turn and the hungry will be filled but the full will again be hungry. Blessed are those who have hit bottom for they have nowhere left to go but up but woe to those who

are riding high for great will be their fall.

This message of woe is what Jeremiah was called to proclaim to the people in Judah. As to be expected, his message did not receive a warm welcome. The authorities plotted against him and the false prophets grew in popularity as they continued to proclaim false blessings. Faced with this opposition, Jeremiah began to complain to God. The response in the lesson today is to remind Jeremiah that those who trust anything other than God are cursed but those who trust in God are like trees planted deep beside the stream. The ups of floods will not uproot them and the downs of drought will not cause them to wither and die. When hope is rooted in God, the cycles of life will not overwhelm us.

Our hope is not in false promises but in the assurance that God will save us. We have that assurance because Christ was raised from the dead. He is the first fruit of all that is promised. This is the reason why Paul repeats emphatically to the Corinthians that Christ is risen! Our hope is not built on the up and down cycles of life but on the resurrection that broke the cycle of death and has given us the promise of life eternal. No matter how bad things become, God will not leave us in the tomb of despair but will raise us to a new hope in Christ. In Christ, the plea of Jeremiah has been answered. And with the hope of the resurrection, those who have been given much freely share with those who have little and those who are struggling are surrounded by family. The cycle of blessings and woes is over for all have found faith, hope, and love in Christ.