

Notes for Next Sunday

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Jeremiah 17:5-8). Paddling upstream is difficult and frustrating and can be disastrous. That is what the Prophet Jeremiah was telling the people of Judah. They were insisting on worshiping idols instead of God. The idol of choice mentioned in verse 5 is their own strength. The picture that Jeremiah paints in verse 6 is nothing short of gruesome. Jeremiah does not stop there. In verse 7-8 he holds before them a portrait of the blessing a man can have if he trusts wholly in the Lord. These verses mirror Psalm 1:3.

Epistle (1 Corinthians 15:12-20). In this reading Paul moves from instruction on spiritual gifts and orderly worship to the resurrection after death. Just like in many other aspects of their spiritual lives, the Corinthian's have a distorted concept of life after death. In verses 1-11 Paul reminds them that he has preached about Jesus' life, death and resurrection. In verses 12-20 Paul uses logic to help them see how futile their lives would be if Christ had not been raised from the dead. He ends up with a powerful statement that Christ, in deed, has been raised and they will live eternally.

Gospel (Luke 6:17-26). These verses are Luke's Sermon on the Plain and parallel Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. In verses 17-19 Jesus does a lot of healing. Then He begins teaching the large crowd. The content of this text begins with blessings and then turns to woes. It is kind of the reverse of how Jeremiah approaches things in our Old Testament reading. The blessings in our gospel are the spiritual godsend that Christ has won for us. We have them because we trust in the Lord and they bring us great joy. The woes pronounced are the result of people trusting in themselves.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Jeremiah 17:5-8

”⁵ This is what the LORD says: “Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. ⁶ He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. ⁷ “But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. ⁸ He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”

Jeremiah shows the real problem. It lies in the heart of the people. He contrasts the two ways – the way of unbelief and the way of faith. The real difference comes out in the long term. (PBC)

To the east of Jerusalem lay the Judean wastelands in which even a scraggly juniper bush had to struggle to live. A little further lay a wilderness in which nothing green lived, the land of salt along the Dead Sea. (PBC)

Using the figures of Psalm 1, Jeremiah pictures this person as a tree planted by the source of water that does not fail. Therefore it is always green and fruit-bearing. It does not have to fear even in the hardest and hottest times. (PBC)

Such is the figure of the believer. He lives by the stream of living water, flowing from Scripture, giving him fellowship with God Himself. Because of this living-giving water, this fountain of life, he can stand up under the toughest times. Jeremiah, no doubt, wants the reader to understand that he too had found

such strength in the Lord. It was his faith alone, sustained and nourished from the Word, that enabled him to be true to his calling and to stand up under the fierce opposition he encountered. (PBC)

EPISTLE – 1 Corinthians 15:12-20

¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. ²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Paul demonstrates thorough skill in classic logic and rhetoric (the art of persuasion) by using careful arguments. His if-then sentences test impossible notions and show the foolish implications of the Corinthians' doubts about the resurrection. (TLSB)

15:12 no resurrection. Greek learning and culture opposed the idea that the body could rise from the dead. Some Greeks believed that the body and physical things were inherently bad but that the spirit was inherently good. Members of the Corinthian congregation continued to hold these opinions, even though they seem to have accepted that Christ rose from the dead. (TLSB)

15:20 firstfruits. The first of any crop, herd or family was given to the Lord. This represented all the rest of the crop, herd or family. In this case it means that Christ' resurrection includes the resurrection of everyone else.

GOSPEL – Luke 6:17-26

¹⁷ He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸ who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil^a spirits were cured, ¹⁹ and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all. ²⁰ Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹ Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²² Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. ²³ "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets. ²⁴ "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. ²⁵ Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶ Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.

The teaching that follows is sometimes called the Sermon on the Plain. Not surprisingly, much of the material recorded here also appears in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5–7). Jesus repeated His teachings at various times and locations, as speakers commonly do. (TLSB)

When one enters the Christian community by Baptism, these beatitudes describe the character of those who belong to this community.

Most of the beatitudes draw on the Gospel theme of the Great Reversal (the idea that the first shall be last, the last shall be first, also expressed in many other kinds of reversal). The Great Reversal runs throughout Luke and is particularly prominent in the Magnificat. (CC p. 268)

6:24–26 The four woes are exact opposites of the four blessings just uttered (vv 20–23). Particularly noteworthy is the contrast between the persecution awaiting Jesus' followers (v 22) and the popularity of those who please men (v 26). (TLSB)