

Weekend of Sunday, February 17, 2019
6th Sunday after the Epiphany/Lectionary 6/Proper 6/Year C
Primary Text: Luke 6:17-26
Secondary Text: Jeremiah 17:5-10
Sermon Title: “Blessings and Woes”

Theme

After choosing his twelve apostles, Jesus teaches a crowd of followers about the nature and demands of discipleship. He begins his great sermon with surprising statements about who is truly blessed in the eyes of God.

Text

¹⁷[Jesus] came down with [the twelve] and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

²⁰Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹“Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

²²“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

²⁴“But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

²⁵“Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

²⁶“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.”

Sermon (Title Slide)

Today's sermon is one in which I am going to tell you the conclusion right at the beginning, because I think, for Christians, it represents conventional wisdom. But I'm a pastor and am immersed in my Christian faith all day, every day so I could be wrong about the conventional wisdom of most Christians.

There are some obvious similarities between the First Reading from Jeremiah and the Gospel Reading from Luke. And that similarity is the inclusion of *blessings and curses* in Jeremiah, and *blessings and woes* in Luke, but they are the same thing in both readings.

I am sure that I am oversimplifying these situations, but I am constantly amazed at the stupidity of people.

Late Thursday night, last January 24th a young mother by the name of Crystal Hernandez was killed as she lay on top of her young son when eight men ranging in age from 18 to 22 fired over 45 shots into her apartment in Youngstown. The eight men are now charged with aggravated murder, murder, conspiracy, felonious assault, and improperly discharging a firearm into the home. The investigation of the murder led police to the child's father who was the intended target of the shooting. The lives of ten adults has been changed forever. That little boy will never know the love of his mother and father.

Last Thursday, Valentine's Day, a Fremont Ohio man pleaded guilty to killing a co-worker whose body was found in her car trunk nearly four years ago.

Paul Manafort, an associate of the President, was investigated in the Russia collusion probe. While being investigated, it was discovered that he had committed tax and bank fraud. He made a deal to cooperate with the investigation for a lighter sentence, but then the investigation has determined that he lied in what he revealed, now putting his deal in jeopardy.

Jeff Bezos, the founder and CEO of Amazon, was recently outed about an affair he was having. Turns out, the story broke because the woman he was having the affair with couldn't help bragging about it with, among others, her brother, who then gave

the story to the Enquirer along with transcripts of text messages between the two lovers.

I could go on and on with stories big and small of what happens when you rely on human thinking and intelligence. And I am not immune from such stinkin' thinkin'. I've made plenty of bone-headed decisions in my life so far, and will probably make plenty more before I die. I hope you do better than me.

The point that I am trying to make is not mine, but the LORD's who inspired Jeremiah to write what he wrote and Jesus Christ to teach what he taught, and that simple message is, blessed are those who trust solely in the LORD, and cursed are those who trust in mortals, whether it be themselves or their mistress's brother, or a political operative.

In the First Reading, Jeremiah wrote that those who "trust in mere mortals" are like shrubs in the desert. They might sprout and grow for a while, but because they don't have great root systems that grow deep, they quickly dry up and die.

And if we really think about it, we know that it is true. It is the rare person who will take a metaphorical bullet for another person. Trump's personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, talked a feisty game of defending his boss, until he was faced with prison, and the long-term inability to provide for his family.

Although it had to be that way, Jesus' own disciples had just sworn an oath to him hours before they abandoned him.

Jesus himself said in the Gospel Reading, and I paraphrase, put your trust in wealth and focus your resources on living the good life and have your ears tickled by people of questionable ambition, and that is all you will get. But there is infinitely more at stake.

On the contrary, Jeremiah wrote, blessed are those who are like a tree planted by water that sends out its deep and mature roots to the nearby stream. In good times it has thrived and is lush and green.

Oh bad times will come to the good and the evil, the saint and the sinner, the tree and the bush, but like the tree, the blessed ones are those who have deep spiritual roots in the LORD.

1

In May 2017, I flew out to California to drive back with my son Aaron who had been studying in Redding CA for the year. He and I decided to take advantage of that opportunity to do some travelling and see some things we have never seen before. Among the sights I wanted to see was the California Redwood forest.

2

The California Redwood forest is, in my opinion, a spiritual and mystical place. These trees are hundreds to thousands of years old and have weathered many natural events.

3

This is Aaron standing in front of one of the largest still alive, creatively named "Big Tree." It is estimated to be 1500 years old, 304 feet tall, the diameter is 21.6 feet and the circumference in 68 feet.

4

Can you imagine living 1500 years? Natural disaster has come and gone and yet these threes have survived forest fires. This one is completely hollowed out for 30 feet and yet it lives and is probably 300 years old.

5

This one survived a forest fire probably 300 years ago and actually has holes burned through it from one side to the other, and it still lives and is probably 800 years old.

6

This one is even bigger and the scar left from a forest fire is big enough to put my dining room furniture in.

7

This tree, named the Dyerville Giant, fell in 1991. The redwood's crash to the ground moved the earth so much that it registered on a nearby seismograph and one

local, who heard the impact from half a mile away, thought a train had crashed. Today you can walk the whole length of the tree and stand in awe of its massive root system beautifully on display. Dyerville Giant Facts: 362 ft. in height 17 ft. diameter 52 ft. circumference Possibly 2,000 years old

8

This shard of wood that I keep in my office is from that tree and though it is 2000 years old and has been dead for 28 years, the wood is still looks like it was harvested yesterday.

I got lost looking through those pictures last Thursday. If you ever get the chance, the Redwoods are thing you must see.

9

Well, that was more than a trip down memory lane for me. The redwoods came to mind when I read that text from Jeremiah, especially :7-8. These massive redwoods which, though started as a tiny seed, develop great trunk crowns, as they are called, that send roots down to water and nutrition sources well beneath the surface. They withstand hurricanes and forest fires, earthquakes and infestation, but always survive.

Title Slide

The LORD told Jeremiah that those of us who trust in the LORD are like those trees. The roots of our faith are deep because in good times and bad we have been nurtured with Bible study, prayer, daily devotions, weekly worship, and the fellowship of the saints who we watched as they weathered the storms of their life. We learned from them and admired how they stood up in the face of difficult times, even death, but stayed strong in their faith in the LORD.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

Brothers and sisters in Christ. We are all mortal. None of us get out of this alive. We will have trouble in life. Some of us will suffer life challenges, (i.e., addiction, job loss, forced relocation, psychological problems, you name it). Some of us will suffer serious illness and in one form or another, and all of us will die.

Now is the time to nurture your spiritual roots with the spiritual disciplines such as Bible study, prayer, daily devotions, weekly worship, and the fellowship of the saints. All will likely suffer at some point in life, but as Jeremiah wrote, those whose spiritual roots are deep will not be anxious, they will not fear, but seek the LORD and his promises.

Prayer

Merciful and loving God, life can be hard, but you are gracious. Send your Holy Spirit that we might be encouraged to grow deeper in faith now, so that when the storms and drought of life come, we may receive nourishment and have our thirsts quenched by you and you alone. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen