

Lectionary Overview-A
4th Sunday after Pentecost
6/25/2023

This week's Lectionary offers some uncomfortable thoughts for those who have chosen to be and remain faithful to God and Jesus Christ. Here's a sample of the words you'll read in the scriptures that follow... enticed, overpowered, laughingstock, terror, stumble, reproach, crucified, destroyed, enslaved, malign. The Patriarchs, Prophets, Disciples, and Apostles were confronted by these actions and setbacks, but they persevered with their witness, ministry, and service. As the opening line of the old hymn says, "Are ye able", said the Master, "To be crucified with me?" Yea", the sturdy dreamers answered, "To the death we'll follow Thee."

Jeremiah 20:7-13

Jeremiah Denounces His Persecutors

- ⁷ O Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me.
- ⁸ For whenever I speak, I must cry out; I must shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long.
- ⁹ If I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.
- ¹⁰ For I hear many whispering: "Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. "Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him and take our revenge on him."
- ¹¹ But the Lord is with me like a terrifying warrior; therefore, my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten.
- ¹² O Lord of hosts, you test the righteous; you see the heart and the mind; let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.
- ¹³ Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.

For a bit of context, in verses 1-6, not shown here, Jeremiah has gotten himself into a bit of trouble. Pash-hur, a Temple priest's security force heard Jeremiah prophesying and put him in wooden stocks for the overnight time. It was a painful posture for sure. Jeremiah refers to him as "Terror All Around". Jeremiah prophesies that the people of Judah will be enslaved by the army of Babylon (present day Iraq). In obeying God's leading, Jeremiah laments that he has suffered by losing friends and being subjected to public ridicule. But after he takes a deep spiritual breath, he offers praise born of confidence in God's power and purpose. And he even predicts the downfall of his oppressors. The fact is that Judah, the southern kingdom, did fall to the Babylonians. Thousands of Israelites were taken captive and led to Babylon. In the human vacuum that remained, people from other nations journeyed to Judah and started new lives which led to a mix of cultures.

Psalm 69:7-10, 16-18

- ⁷ It is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that shame has covered my face.
- ⁸ I have become a stranger to my kindred, an alien to my mother's children.
- ⁹ It is zeal for your house that has consumed me; the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.
- ¹⁰ When I humbled my soul with fasting, they insulted me for doing so.
- ¹⁶ Answer me, Lord, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me.
- ¹⁷ Do not hide your face from your servant; answer me quickly, for I am in trouble.
- ¹⁸ Come near and rescue me; deliver me because of my foes.

Psalm 69 and Psalm 22 are similar in that they have good number of self-labeled curses. Today's selection shows only a few, but the reading bears a resemblance to what Jeremiah expressed. Jesus uses verse 9 as a basis in John 2:17 after He had cleared the Temple and offers to God, "Zeal for your house will consume me." Jesus has set himself on a collision course with the Jewish Pharisees but has also made himself an icon of bravery and resolve. If we were to do something similar, we might feel isolated and may want to know that God is close for protection, rescue, reassurance, and love.

Romans 6:1b-11

6 *What then are we to say?* ^{1b} Should we continue in sin in order that grace may increase? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, so we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For whoever has died is freed^[a] from sin. ⁸ But if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Paul's letter to the Romans is a rich, broad, and deep outlay of the Christians gift of Justification and Sanctification. We live under God's grace because of our outwardly expressed faith in Jesus Christ. Sin is an emotional weight we carry and can be weakened by guilt, shame, regret, and even hopelessness. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, ⁸ "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— ⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast." So, Paul asks if more sin would lead to more grace. His response, "Certainly not", in the Greek is translated as a scoff of disbelief that such a question is even valid. If we honestly give Jesus our burden of sin by faith, he gladly accepts it at the cross. It's done. So, the subsequent union of our spirit is with Him. Our old self was crucified with Him. We now live, justified by faith. What happens next is a lifetime of serving Him. That is the ongoing Sanctification. It may be tough at times. One might fail at times, but the Grace is always present in the life we live for Christ.

Matthew 10:24-39

²⁴ "A disciple is not above the teacher nor a slave above the master; ²⁵ it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

Whom to Fear as a Disciple

²⁶ "So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷ What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸ Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.^[a] ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. ³² "Everyone, therefore, who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

Jesus did not promise that he brought a quiet future for believers and servants.

³⁴ "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword.

³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law,

³⁶ and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

³⁷ "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, ³⁸ and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

In the verses preceding the verses above, Jesus has chosen the disciples. He told them to seek out the "lost sheep" rather than the current believers. In so doing he told them to perform miracles, raise the dead, heal the sick, and cast out demons. But he reminds them of their place. They are not above their Master (Jesus). He wants to remind them a faithful, active mission if one of courage, impact, and reward. In case they wondered whether their work would be noticed, Jesus says that God is planning everything. If a sparrow cannot fall without God's knowledge, the certainly a servant's plans and actions will all be known to God. Finally, Christ bluntly reminds them that their work will not be easy or free from rejection. A servant must be totally committed. Family and friends come second.