

Sermon for Epiphany 6C
Sunday, February 13, 2022
“Trust God”

Texts: Jeremiah 17:5-10; Psalm 1; Luke 6:17-26

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

As I looked at this week’s readings, I found myself drawn to the words of the Prophet Jeremiah and the psalm. Although Jeremiah was a prophet, the text that we heard this morning is considered to be wisdom literature, meaning it consists of statements that offer teachings about divinity and virtue: “Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is in the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream.” The psalmist makes similar statements: “Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor lingered in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seats of the scornful! Their delight is in the law of the Lord, and they meditate on his law day and night.” Trust in God and our dependence on him to lead us along right paths are the way that God intends us to live. It is this trust that makes life liveable.

I want to talk a little about what was going on in Jeremiah’s world that led to his words of wisdom. Jeremiah was living at a time in Israel’s history when the kingdom was divided: Israel in the north, and Judah in the south. Jerusalem was in the south, in Judah. Jeremiah prophesied to the people of Judah when it seemed that they had broken their covenant with God and violated the terms they agreed to as written in the Torah. He accused them of worshipping Canaanite gods and building shrines to their idols; their leaders—kings, priests, and prophets—had become corrupt and abandoned the Torah and the covenant; and, as a result, rampant social injustice resulted. The most vulnerable people in the community were being horribly mistreated—that is, the widows, orphans, and immigrants—in violation of the Torah, and the leaders were just looking the other way. Not only that, while they were still worshipping in the temple, they were worshipping foreign gods outside the temple, even to the point of sacrificing children! Jeremiah was trying to get the people and their leaders back on track, because if they didn’t stop violating the covenant and engaging in sin, an enemy from the north—Babylon—would conquer them and scatter them, which is eventually what happened, because they did not stop.

The psalmist’s first words gave simple, sound advice: those who follow the law of the Lord are happy and blessed; those who do not are doomed. It seems fairly cut and dry, and looking at what eventually happened to Israel, it seems pretty bleak. When I think about what Israel was dealing with during the days of the Prophet Jeremiah, it seems that his world wasn’t that different from ours. We may not worship Baal or other false gods, but our modern society has its own false gods. Our society worships money, power, fame, glamor, and comfortable living. We may not sacrifice children in the temple, but we often ignore the most vulnerable in society, we look the other way when

we see racism, intolerance, rejection of those who are different. We act like we don't notice. We say we don't want to get involved. We go on living our comfortable lives while many of our human sisters and brothers continue to suffer.

But, it's the words of Jesus through Luke's version of his Sermon on the Mount where we get a new perspective on this theme of trusting in God. Jesus turns this whole thing on its head and tells the people to have hope. His world was essentially no different from Jeremiah's or ours. He and his people lived under Roman rule. He preached a message that did not conform to the actions of the Jewish status quo, which often was corrupted. Yet, in the midst of all that, he gave his listeners a glimmer of hope—maybe even more than a glimmer. Those who live in poverty will receive the rewards of the kingdom of God. Those who are hungry will be fed. Those who are sad, despondent, or downright destitute will find happiness, not just in the here and now, but in the end. Jesus was telling his followers that if they lived righteous lives, following God's commandments and being loving to each other and to all people, they would enjoy happy lives. He wasn't saying that they wouldn't have to face difficulties in their lives; he wasn't saying that living a righteous life would somehow protect us against the changes and chances of real life; but, Jesus was encouraging and reassuring his followers that *when* life gets hard, their righteous and faithful living will make life more bearable. Their righteous living and unshakable faith in God would give them strength to get through and survive the conditions they found themselves in. Their faith in God would sustain them while they dealt with the realities of life that they probably could not change: their poverty, their treatment by their government leaders, their treatment by their religious leaders, probably even the things that caused them to suffer.

That same message continues to speak to us now in the 21st Century, in the world in which *we* live? It goes back to Jeremiah's advice to Israel to trust in the Lord. It is only through our faith in God and his faithfulness to us that we will be able to survive in this world. If we hold on to that faith, then if we are hungry and impoverished in any way—whether it be lack of money, loss in our lives, or lack of food itself—God will provide for us and fill us with what we need. We need to keep the faith and have patience, because God doesn't always act in the time frame that we imagine, nor does he often act in the way we expect. But when he does act, it's often better than what we had imagined. We must take a good look and see where God is indeed acting in our lives. We need to reflect on the ways in which we have been blessed by God. We can all say that we are blessed in this very moment; at the very least, we've all survived the pandemic; even if you got sick with the Coronavirus, God got you through it and you have survived. Maybe you don't have a lot of money in the bank, but examine yourself and your life to find the places where you are rich—where you have something that somebody else doesn't. Maybe you possess a skill or talent that you're able to do or things that you know. If you are hungry or feel unfulfilled, if you think you are poor,

think about the things that feed you physically and spiritually; think of the things that make you who you are. What things in your life give you joy? Ponder just how blessed you are to have them. Because, you see, those who seem rich on the outside probably lack something else in their lives that you might have. The people who seem to eat in all the fancy restaurants or always have lots of food on their dining room table may be hungering for love, acceptance, or even finding their path in life. The face that is all smiles and laughter may be hiding a heart of pain and a life of turmoil. You just never know, and as humans, we are *all* dealing with *something*.

We must maintain our trust in God. We have hope in God that if we simply trust him, trust his timing, trust his guidance, then we will survive in this big bad world. We must not let the trials of this life distract or derail us, but rather, we must be “like a tree planted by water,” sending our roots by the stream (where we will be further nourished), and where we will have strength to weather any storm. We will bear fruit and have leaves that do not wither. Everything we do shall prosper, for we will be living the life that God intends for us to live, trusting in his love and power.

And what is righteous living? Some folks think that doing everything that the Bible says is righteous living. There are even churches that preach that one must follow the words of the Bible to the letter. Jesus dealt with the same kinds of people and the same message from the religious leaders of his time. But, Jesus reminded them—as he does for us today—that the message of the scriptures is to help us love God better, to help us have more confidence in him, despite our shortcomings, our failings, our human brokenness, and to help us love each other more fully by respecting one another and treating one another as wonderful creatures of God.

The bottom line is that there is joy in following Jesus. There is joy in living righteous lives. That joy comes from knowing that no matter what happens to us, God loves us, God will protect us, and God will give us the strength to survive, and in the fullness of time when our earthly life is at its end, we will be received into God’s loving arms. Amen.

Resources

Read Scripture, Jeremiah (video), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSK36cHbrk0>

Commentary on Jeremiah 17:5-10, <http://hwallace.unitingchurch.org.au/WebOTcomments/EpiphanyC/Epiphany6.html>

Commentary on Luke 6:17-26, <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/LkEpiphany6.htm>