

The Lessons for the 2nd Sunday after Pentecost / June 7th

Illumination

The prophet Jeremiah is angry and upset. God has called him to prophesy to the people about the destruction that their failure to be righteous and just will bring upon them, but they will not listen. Worse, they laugh and deride him when he shouts about their impending peril. Anger scorches his bones like a burning fire, and he cannot hold it in. Even his close friends wait for him to stumble. But Jeremiah knows that it is his persecutors who will stumble, for God is with him like a warrior at his side.

The First Lesson is from Jeremiah

(20:7-13)

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. 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. 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. 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." But the Lord is with me like a dread 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. 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. Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.

Illumination:

This Psalm echoes the themes in the Jeremiah reading that we hear just before it. Like Jeremiah, the Psalmist spoke for God, only to become the subject of scorn and reproach from his own friends and family, and even had songs sung about him by drunkards at the city gate. The Psalmist calls on God to save him from their hatred, to turn to him in compassion and save him from his enemies.

We will read a portion of Psalm 69 responsively by whole verse

⁸ Surely, for your sake have I suffered reproach, *
and shame has covered my face.

***⁹ I have become a stranger to my own kindred, *
an alien to my mother's children.***

¹⁰ Zeal for your house has eaten me up; *
the scorn of those who scorn you has fallen upon me.

***¹¹ I humbled myself with fasting, *
but that was turned to my reproach.***

¹² I put on sack-cloth also, *
and became a byword among them.

***¹³ Those who sit at the gate murmur against me, *
and the drunkards make songs about me.***

¹⁴ But as for me, this is my prayer to you, *
at the time you have set, O Lord:

***¹⁵ "In your great mercy, O God, *
answer me with your unfailing help.***

¹⁶ Save me from the mire; do not let me sink; *
let me be rescued from those who hate me and out of the deep waters.

***¹⁷ Let not the torrent of waters wash over me,
neither let the deep swallow me up; *
do not let the Pit shut its mouth upon me.***

¹⁸ Answer me, O Lord, for your love is kind; *
in your great compassion, turn to me.'

***¹⁹ "Hide not your face from your servant; *
be swift and answer me, for I am in distress.***

²⁰ Draw near to me and redeem me; *
because of my enemies deliver me.

Illumination:

If Paul's tone in this short passage from his letter to the early church in Rome seems intense, that may be because Paul so fiercely wants us to grasp his theological point: In baptism, everything changes, and that matters! Baptism unites us with Christ so that we share in his death and resurrection. In baptism we symbolically "die" to our old life enslaved by sin. In baptism we are born to a new life, freed from sin through God's abounding grace, dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus.

A reading from the letter to the Romans

(6:1b-11)

Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been 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 too might walk in newness of life.

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. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

We think of Jesus as the Prince of Peace, yet here we find him telling his disciples that he has not come to bring peace but a sword! Family members will be set against each other, he goes on, warning his followers that they must leave their families to follow him. These disturbing verses continue Jesus's stern instructions to the apostles that we heard last Sunday. This may reflect the difficult times when the evangelist we know as Matthew was writing his Gospel: The Roman Empire had crushed a Jewish rebellion, leaving Jerusalem shattered and the Temple in ruins. Jewish Christians and Rabbinic Judaism were splitting apart in angry rivalry. In such a time it would have been not only difficult but dangerous to follow Jesus's Way.

The Gospel according to Matthew (10:24-39)

Jesus said to the twelve disciples, “A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; 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!

“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

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

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;
and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

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; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”