

**First United Methodist Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Lectionary Study Guide**

For use the week of February 11-17, 2019

6th Sunday after the Epiphany

February 17, 2019

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Jeremiah 17:5-10

⁵ Thus says the Lord: “Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord. ⁶ They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. ⁷ Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. ⁸ They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. ⁹ The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it? ¹⁰ I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.”

Commentary

These verses outline two ways of living—only two—there is no middle ground. Those who trust in mere mortals are accursed (vv. 5-6), but those who trust in the Lord are blessed (vv. 7-8). It is not a sin to trust people, but it is a sin to trust *in* people—to invest our deepest faith in another person and to derive our dearest hope from that person—to give that person the place in our hearts that rightfully belongs to God. Conversely, the tree planted alongside water is a metaphor for a life lived trusting in God. Plants need water to survive. A tree planted alongside a body of water will always be able to find the water it needs to grow and produce fruit. These verses are like Psalm 1, which pronounces blessings on those whose “delight is in Yahweh’s law” (v. 2). The focus of verses 9-10 returns to the human heart. It is difficult for us to understand other people’s hearts, because people disguise their deepest thoughts and feelings to show their best side. But the Lord is not subject to these human limitations. We cannot deceive the Lord.

Reflection

In what or in whom do you put your trust? Is the source of your life found in God or in something else?

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷ If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. ²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

Commentary

The Corinthian Christians found it difficult to believe in the possibility (or even the desirability) of their own resurrection from the dead. The dualistic environment in which they lived emphasized the soul as *good* and the body as *bad*, and that has a great deal to do with their doubts. Paul's question in v. 12 is quite logical. If these Corinthian Christians believe in Christ's bodily resurrection, then they cannot say that there is no resurrection of the dead. However (v.17), if Christ was not raised from the dead, the Christian faith is based on a lie. When Paul says that the resurrected Christ is "the first fruits of those who have died," he is telling these Corinthian Christians that Christ's resurrection is just the beginning. His resurrection signals the abundance of resurrections yet to come—the resurrection of all those who have placed their faith in Christ.

Reflection

Do you really believe in the resurrection of Christ? What difference does it make to believe or not believe in Christ's resurrection?

Luke 6:17-26

¹⁷ He came down with them 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. ¹⁸ They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹ And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

²⁰ Then 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. ²³ Rejoice 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.”

Commentary

Much of this material is also found in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Luke’s less familiar version is known as the Sermon on the Plain, because Jesus “came down with them, and stood on a level place” (6:17). Luke places the Sermon on the Plain after a series of conflict stories in which scribes and Pharisees take offense at Jesus for violating religious taboos. They try to defend a traditional understanding of God’s people (Godly Jews vs. ungodly Gentiles) and traditional morality (sabbath observance, etc.). Jesus counters, in each instance, by showing them a new way—but they refuse to see. Jesus then gives his Sermon on the Plain, in which he further turns their legalistic world on its head. In this sermon, Jesus gives them a glimpse into the kingdom of God—an upside-down world by their standards.

Reflection

Would your life be different if you followed the counsel of Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Plain? Why do we often choose another path?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 1

- ^{1:1} Blessed are those
 who do not walk in the counsel of the wicked;
 or stand in the way of sinners,
 or sit in the seat of scoffers;
- ² but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
 and on God’s law they meditate day and night.
- ³ They are like trees
 planted by streams of water
 that yield their fruit in season,
 and their leaves do not wither.
 In all that they do, they prosper.
- ⁴ The wicked are not so,
 but are like chaff which the wind drives away.
- ⁵ **Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment;**

nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶ for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Closing Prayer

Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Commentary content adapted from www.sermonwriter.com.