

Sermon - February 13, 2022 – Epiphany 6

Blessed or Cursed?

Jeremiah 17:5–8

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The text for the sermon is the Old Testament Reading for today, from the seventeenth chapter of Jeremiah, verses 5–8, in which we hear the word cursed and the word blessed. And for us to weight really to take sides.

Now, last Sunday we had begun with a series on Stewardship. Typically, stewardship has been understood as the administration of our time, talents, and treasure. However, biblical stewardship goes deeper than that. As you see, God has vested and blessed us with distinctive and even unique vocations, which he expects us to do and realize. And with those vocations he expects us to use the resources – the gifts – he gives so that those vocations can be achieved, in the service of God’s kingdom, the church, and outside of the Church. Or as the apostle Peter puts it: “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:... (1 Peter 4:10).

Varied grace, or as other versions translate “grace in various forms” refers to those gifts, or resources, given to each vocation, and the vocations themselves, which are the provisions of God’s grace, united and working together on our behalf in service of one another, all rooted and meaning from one kind of Grace, God’s grace through Christ. That undeserved favor of God given to man for our regeneration, sanctification and redemption through Son, Jesus Christ given to die in our stead.

As you see that grace it depends solely on the nature and heart of God. And through that we have been made into God’s forgiven children

inheritor of that grace. And that grace also enables us to be gracious with others, we are enabled to view others through the eyes of grace. Just as Paul instructs us in his letter to the Romans: “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.” (Rom. 12:3NIV).

That practice, the varied mercy, we begin to see already in the early church, as the book of Acts tells us: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common.⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42-47)

That's stewardship at its best. Working for the betterment of the community in general, with the goal of salvation of those who are outside of the kingdom, the Church. And that's God's desire, in fact that's the result of the fruitful blessings we hear in the readings for today. In other words, for us to produce fruits, we need to practice a good stewardship, stewardship that has as its core, God's mercy. But for that we need to trust the giver, we need to choose him, we need to be grounded in him and trust him alone.

But are we? Are you grounded and trusting him alone? The present time and what we have gone through lately, might have revealed something about that. Let's face it, these are difficult times we're living in. Economic uncertainty, political unrest, financial hardships, anxiety about health and safety can all magnify any personal turmoil we might be facing. When faced with these challenges, where do you go or what do you do to get through them? What have you done so far? Who have you trusted for help to get through these difficult times in which we're living? Yourself? Others? Or is it to the Lord you have gone to? Whom or what we have trusted, will determine our life of stewardship indeed.

So often, instead of trusting the giver of the manifold display of grace, we trust our human abilities as we wade through this time and era. Even though we are to trust God for we know that trust in the Lord is better than to trust in human strength. Yet, we try to do things ourselves. But in the end according to the reading of Jeremiah, the difference is either blessing or curse.

There really are only those two ways: trusting in man or trusting in the Lord. The Lord said to his people. And know the result of each of the ways, God said through the prophet Jeremiah, "You are cursed if you do not trust in the Lord, if you only trust in humanity and in human strength and wisdom, and if you turn away from the Lord. Rather, blessed are you when you trust in the Lord and commit your life to him."

The one who trusts in himself is like a stubby shrub in a desert with no water about. Nothing good is going to come from that. Certainly, no prospering nor full luxuriant growth, no shade to cover the neighbour, and worse, it will be like a shrub that will eventually wither and die.

In contrast, one who trusts in the Lord, and commits his life to the Lord, is like a strong, green tree that grows and prospers and bears fruit because it has its deep roots in the life-giving waters. It doesn't worry nor is it afraid if there's a drought; it can weather anything because it has a never-failing, ever-flowing stream of life to support it and to see it through.

So, this morning it will do us good to take a hard look into our lives and ask this question, whom am I trusting? Is it myself? If you are trusting yourself, know this, you wouldn't be alone in that. People will say, "I'm smart enough; I'm good enough. People like me. I've got enough money. I've got friends; I've got my networks. I can do just fine." You might say the same things and be proud of it.

Or alternatively, people have trusted other human beings and powers, still trusting myself, yes, only I'm depositing my trust in somebody else, or something else.

Think about this, what is it that makes you feel good at the end of the day? What is it that makes you feel warm inside and even maybe accomplished? We have seen how so many have trusted in politicians, even thinking that a certain man or men, were sent by God, close to having divine powers to save a country, a community. Other's have trusted their ideologies, and philosophy, or even their religion whatever that is.

But over all what have we forgotten? What's left out of the equation? If these are the things you trust in, then hear what God says, he says "Cursed are you!"

Now, this is a strong statement, isn't it? How is it that God curses his people? What kind of a God is he, a jealous God?

It is not that God is jealously, throwing a fit because we chose and focus on our human powers and ideas. If we look closely, we will find that

God even blesses us with some of that if not with all. The problem is that when we remove God out of the equation, all those things we trust in, will eventually fail us. That failure and its consequence, God says is your curse. Those things won't last forever; they'll die with you, or you will die with them. Will they help you in the life of the world to come? No! Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God" (Mt 6:33). Not as a last resort, but first! Cursed are you! Not only will they fail you, but you also have not turned to the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Turning from the Lord means we have despised and neglected the Lord. We have sought help only in ourselves. Will that be enough on the Last Day? When we stand before the Lord, who will our help be? Ourselves? "Cursed is the man who trusts in man" (v 5).

You remember Goliath, right? A giant who was brought down by a pebble shot by a young shepherd David. What was the reason of his demise? Goliath trusted himself. In the end his strength failed him, it brought him down.

In contrast, David trusted in God his Lord. That's the contrast the text points out: "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord" (v 7), for the Lord only is able to prosper and protect you. He is the one who will give you full life now and eternally. Not only will all others disappoint and fail you, but your turning to others is really a turning from the Lord.

Trusting in the Lord is like being planted by an ever-flowing river of water. It doesn't matter if it doesn't rain; there's always water. So where would you want to be planted? Or where would you plant your crop? By the river or in the desert? So it is with trust in the Lord. Where would you rather be planted?

That is, in whom do you trust? You say, “the Lord,” but do you? You might say, “Well, not at first, but if all else fails, I’ve got the Lord to fall back on.” You wouldn’t like to be anyone’s second or third or last choice, would you? But that’s what we do with the Lord.

Therefore, we deserve what we would get. We deserve to be parched, to wither and to die, because we have not trusted in God, who says, “Come unto me, and I will give rest (cf Mt 11:28); I will give you life” (cf Jn 10:10).

We have failed to trust in the Lord; we have failed to seek him first. But there is one who did all things well (Mk 7:37), who trusted in the Lord with all his heart, soul, and mind. That is our Lord Jesus. In the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus trusted the Word of the Lord to take care of him and his life. And when he died on the cross, parched and thirsty, not because of any sin in him but rather for us and for our salvation, Jesus still said even then, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Lk 23:46).

Jesus suffered on the cross all the curses we deserve and in their place gives us all the blessings we have not earned. He poured out his life that we may have life from him. When Jesus rose from the dead, he breathed the Holy Spirit on his disciples, empowering them to preach the good news of forgiveness of sins (Jn 20:19–23).

So repent of your sin of not trusting in the Lord and trusting in yourself. Believe the incredibly wonderful, good news that your sin of mistrust and lack of trust, and trust in yourself, is forgiven and paid for on the cross by Jesus. Know that life, true life, life never failing, comes from God. Stay connected to him, for he is your life and salvation (Ps 27:1) and will prosper your life and growth for his purposes. He will lead you to streams of living

water and green pastures in the house of the Lord forever. Blessed are you who trust in the Lord Jesus.

That's God's grace to the fullest. And do you know what God's grace does? The Scripture says: "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." (2 Cor. 9:8)

Surely the promise of God stands: "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. ⁸He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."

Stewardship then dear friends begins right there, with bien planted by water, that when it grows, it does produce fruits, fruits of grace and mercy to others, just like God through Jesus shows us grace and mercy, for his glory.

Amen.