

The Good News Daily
For St. Matthew's Church
Bloomington, IL

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Number 9

Sunday, March 1

Jeremiah 1:1-10 *The words of Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It also came in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month. (vv.1-3 NRSV)*

Last week would have been my parents' 71st wedding anniversary, an observation that some in my family have suggested reflects an unhealthy obsession with meaningless dates, especially when my observation relates to the death of a long-gone member of the family.

My point is that these opening lines from the book of the prophet Jeremiah are much more profound than the historical detail might suggest, because they place Jeremiah (and, by extension, each of us) in a specific chapter of God's story of creation, fall, redemption, and eternity.

My grandmother, who died on February 7, 1988, in the first month of the last year of the presidency of Ronald Reagan, faithfully maintained a book of the days of the year in which she recorded the dates of the births, wedding anniversaries, and deaths of remote family members and friends of whom my sisters and I would otherwise have had no knowledge or any reason to care. I think she may have been trying to teach us all something that we might not have learned from Jeremiah—that God has plans for you, “plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope” (29:11).

As we grow older, history has a way of taking the future away from us, perhaps because we so often refuse to live in the here and now. When the reality of our personal failures and our own powerlessness to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat and death becomes undeniable, all we have left is hope—hope that God will somehow bring us, and our children, home to him. Fortunately, that's just what He promises.

Psalms 24, 29; Psalms 24, 29; 1 Corinthians 3:11-23; Mark 3:31—4:9

ANGLICAN CYCLE: PRAY for Mbale – (Uganda) The Rt Revd Patrick Gidudu

DIOCESAN CYCLE: St. Andrew's, Carbondale, The Very Rev. Kathryn G. Jeffrey, Rector; Tutuo Parish: Rev. Jonas Mkuyu, Tabora, Tanzania; The Mission of The Holy Spirit, District of Independencia, Lima, Peru, The Rev. Esteban Zapata, Priest in Charge. Ordination to the Priesthood, Kathryn G. Jeffrey, Carbondale.

ST. MATTHEW'S: Birthday of Bill Ingersoll.

Monday, March 2

John 4:27-42: *So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. (vv.40, 41)*

At the conclusion of this familiar story of Jesus' seemingly chance encounter with a nameless woman at Jacob's well in Samaria, a region the Jews in Jesus' company would ordinarily have avoided, we have an interesting detail that had previously escaped my attention. As the story begins, Jesus has left Judea to return to Galilee to avoid the Pharisees, whose

opposition has been aroused by his increasing notoriety. At the end of the story, Jesus has lingered with these previously hostile people for two unplanned (?) days to share the good news of God's salvation. True to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah in verse 12 of today's Old Testament reading, that "I am watching over my word to perform it," Jesus seems totally focused on the people in whose midst he now finds himself, rather than on thoughts of where he has come from or where he is going.

In the routine of my workaday life, filled with deadlines and distractions, it's easy to become angry or resentful at the endless interruptions. And yet I find that some of the best and most productive moments come from just such intrusions. Thank You, God, for reminders that you are faithfully working out Your purposes, unhurried and unruffled, and with the patience to be present in each and every moment. Help me to become more like You.

Jeremiah 1:11-19; Psalms 56, 57, 58; Romans 1:1-15

ANGLICAN CYCLE: Mbamili – (Niger, Nigeria) The Rt Revd Henry Okeke

DIOCESAN CYCLE: For the LORD God is both sun and shield; he will give grace and glory.

ST. MATTHEW'S: Anniversary of Ina Rehtmeyer

Tuesday, March 3

Psalm 61 *Let me abide in your tent forever, find refuge under the shelter of your wings. For you, O God, have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.* (vv.4-5)

Today's reading from John's Gospel concludes the story of Jesus' return to Galilee, where he had previously been welcomed, from his home region of Judea, where he had encountered opposition, and it includes Jesus' observation that "a prophet has no honor in [his] own country" (v.44). But when Jesus encounters the official from Capernaum whose son lay dying, he responds in seeming frustration, saying "unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe" (v.48).

Am I willing to accept Jesus for who he says he is? Am I looking for dramatic "signs and wonders" to confirm my faith, or am I willing to rely on a simple faith and trust in his eternal power and divine nature? I give thanks for a legacy of faith, not one that I have discovered or constructed on my own, but one that was handed down to me, both by my own family and by all the diverse communities of faith of which I have been blessed to be a part.

Thanks be to God for a heritage of faith, the faith of our fathers and mothers, and of all the family hands who have been the "weavers of our cloth" (Mary Chapin Carpenter).

Jeremiah 2:1-13; Psalm 62; Romans 1:16-25; John 4:43-54

ANGLICAN CYCLE: Mbeere – (Kenya) The Rt Revd Moses Nthuka

DIOCESAN CYCLE: Holy Spirit, guide us in our work for the Church.

ST. MATTHEW'S: Birthday of Lorinda DeMeritt and Dianne Priess.

Wednesday, March 4

Romans 1:28—2:11 *...while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury.* (v.8)

As one who makes his living in the law, words are my stock-in-trade. I love both the challenge of precise sentence construction and the selection of the most appropriate term or phrase for the thought and meaning I seek to convey. The etymology of terms and the nuance of synonyms occupy much of my thought as I sit at the keyboard. But if the object of the law is to reveal the truth, the use of the right words and expressions is crucial and must take precedence

over the most artful and crafty forms. So I've chosen for a caption for today's readings a mere half-sentence from the lawyer among the group of authors that seems to summarize succinctly a thread that runs through all of these passages.

The danger of misapprehension and misapplication of the law is illustrated by today's reading of John's account of another of Jesus' healings on the Sabbath. An inappropriate focus on one aspect of the law (in this case, the remembrance of the Sabbath, to keep it holy) can blind us to more important aspects of the law and, ultimately, to the truth himself.

Jeremiah's fierce condemnation of Judah's unfaithfulness in today's passage (described by the editors of the *Life with God Bible* with wry understatement as "not the most genteel language in the Bible"), seems to boil down to the charge in verses 10 and 11 that Israel's "false sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but only in pretense.... Faithless Israel has shown herself less guilty than false Judah." Lord Jesus, help me always to seek after your truth and obey it, in spite of its frequent inconvenience.

Jeremiah 3:6-18; Psalm 72; John 5:1-18

ANGLICAN CYCLE: Mbashe – (Southern Africa) The Rt Revd Elliot Williams

DIOCESAN CYCLE: Happy are they who trust in HIM!

ST. MATTHEW'S: Those who will attend Diocesan Camp and St. Michael's Conference this summer.

Thursday, March 5

Romans 2:12-24 *When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts...* (vv.14-15).

Continuing yesterday's lesson from Romans, Paul goes on to say (borrowing a phrase from Jeremiah) that "what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when...God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all." (vv.15, 16).

I'm not sure whether Paul's argument here is intended to be in the form of a syllogism, but as the *Life With God Bible* commentary puts it, "Paul, knowing how we love to put people into categories [Jews and Gentiles, for example] that give us a vocabulary for treating them impersonally and giving us an edge over them, puts a stop to it from the start. God does not deal with us in categories. This habit of making distinctions and assuming superiorities is deadly to spiritual formation." And to other things as well.

Having recently endured another election season with its endless stream of distorted and deceptive campaign ads, I find myself eager for the secret thoughts of the sponsors to be revealed. I can almost imagine that it is God singing to us the words of songwriter Billy Joel: "Honesty is such a lonely word, everyone is so untrue; honesty is hardly ever heard, and mostly what I need from you" (52nd Street, 1978).

Jeremiah 4:9-10, 19-28; Psalms 70, 71; John 5:19-29

ANGLICAN CYCLE: Meath & Kildare – (Dublin, Ireland) The Rt Revd Patricia Louise Storey

DIOCESAN CYCLE: St. Thomas, Salem, Anniversary of the Consecration of Church building, 1926.

ST. MATTHEW'S: Birthday of Erik Larson and Heather Mather.

Friday, March 6

Jeremiah 5:1-9 *Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look around and take note! Search its squares and see if you can find one person who acts justly and seeks truth—so that I may pardon Jerusalem.* (v.1)

In another variation on this theme, somewhat reminiscent of God's dialogue with Abraham concerning the city of Sodom, today's powerful reading from Jeremiah begins with the image of an early Diogenes, roaming the streets of Jerusalem with his lantern, looking for an honest person. Jeremiah perceives the falsity of all he finds, rich and poor alike, in that they swear by the Lord and know the way of the Lord, "but they all alike had broken the yoke, they had burst the bonds" (v.5).

Jesus cautions us about judging others in the Sermon on the Mount, and the reason for this caution is underscored in today's Gospel passage when he says, "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, *because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me*" (John 5:30). In all honesty, I must admit that I have my own agenda and that it is often not aligned with God's. Consequently, my own judgments are inherently suspect and unreliable.

In spite of this realization, however, I find it difficult to avoid making subtle, often subconscious judgments concerning others with whom I may disagree. And, on reflection, I find that I have limited my interaction with those with whom I may have strong disagreements—the very sort of self-selection denounced in yesterday's lessons. In contrast, Jesus seems to have sought such encounters—not to pronounce judgment, but to offer a still more excellent way—by giving his love.

Psalm 69; Romans 2:25—3:18; John 5:30-47

ANGLICAN CYCLE: Medak – (South India) – Vacant

DIOCESAN CYCLE: Birthday of The Rev Mary Christine "Mollie" Ward, Bloomington; Pray for the attendees at the Annual ECW Retreat this weekend at Toddhall.

ST. MATTHEW'S: Birthday of Jane Shadid and Diane Wuesthoff.

Saturday, March 7

John 7:1-13 *Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here."* (v.6)

Today's Gospel text provides a very fitting conclusion to this week's readings, especially when chapter 7 is taken as a whole. As the story goes, Jesus' brothers urge him to attend the Festival of Booths for a photo-op, but he declines by saying his time has not yet come. Then he goes to the festival anyway, in secret, seemingly to avoid the inevitable confrontation that his brothers had anticipated. And after provoking a controversy with his teaching and stirring up questions concerning his identity, instead of responding to the questions directly, Jesus confounds the crowd and the officials by offering them living water.

The offer is unconditional; for all comers—all who thirst for truth and life. If he who is truth incarnate can see and yet forgive the dishonesty and hypocrisy in my life, why is it so difficult for me to do the same for others? Change my heart, O God; make it ever true. Change my heart, O God, may I be like You.

Jeremiah 5:20-31; Psalms 75, 76; Romans 3:19-31

ANGLICAN CYCLE: The Most Revd Philip Leslie Freier Archbishop of Melbourne & Primate elect of Australia Melbourne – Eastern Region – (Victoria, Australia) The Rt Revd Barbara Darling; Melbourne – Northern & Western Region – The Rt Revd Philip Huggins; Melbourne – Southern Region – The Rt Revd Paul White.

DIOCESAN CYCLE: Birthday of Sue, wife of The Rev Thomas A Davis, Kell; Pray for the attendees at the Annual ECW Retreat this weekend at Toddhall.

ST. MATTHEW'S: Birthday of George Dyson, Roger Hunt, Matt Matsuda, and Geraldine Bollbracht.

by Rod Jones

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