

**St. Paul Lutheran Church
Grant Park, Illinois
The Sixth Sunday after Epiphany, February 17, 2019
Jeremiah 17:5-8**

This is what the LORD says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. "But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

Have you ever heard of the town in New Mexico named Truth or Consequences? It is a rather forbidden sounding name isn't it? It sounds like something a mobster might say to someone. You better tell the truth or there'll be consequences. Or maybe it is something a parent will say to a child who they suspect is lying and they want the truth from them by saying, "You better come clean or there'll be major consequences if I find out you're lying to me."

The main idea of truth or consequences is you give someone a choice. A person will either tell you the truth or they will face punishment for their choices. Our Old Testament lesson brings to mind a person who is facing a choice much like someone who needs to choose between truth or consequences. Except, we are going to tweak the idea of truth or consequences just a little. We're going to look at the idea of trust or consequences.

Jeremiah lays out the two options for us in our lesson. **"This is what the LORD says: 'Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him.'"**

"He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." Jeremiah lays out two scenarios for us. He pictures a bush in a desert and a bush which is planted by a stream. Both men teach us an important lesson about trusting in God or facing consequences.

What is the meaning which the Lord is trying to drive home with this first person? **"This is what the LORD says: 'Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.'"**

These words show us the Lord is trying to help us to see things from his perspective in our world. He wants his followers to look to him for guidance and protection rather than trusting in and depending on earthly things for guidance and protection. He does this by saying everyone who relies on human strength and turns their hearts away from the Lord are cursed. He promises the people who turn their hearts away from the Lord will eventually come to ruin.

What kind of person does the Lord have in mind when he calls someone cursed? Our gospel lesson gives us some clues. Jesus says, **"But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets."**

What do you think Jesus means with his words? Is he saying you're cursed if you are rich in this world? Or you're cursed if you ever laugh at something? Or you will face bad consequences if people say good things about you? What does Jesus mean with his words? I know it might feel like we are running in

circles, but the Lord's words offer us a clue to what Jesus means. **"Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD."**

Jesus isn't calling the rich or the well fed or those who laugh or people who are generally praised by others cursed. He isn't, but he is exposing a temptation which Christians face in our world. Riches, food, entertainment and popularity are all tools which Satan uses to tempt us to turn our hearts away from the Lord. He wants us to value riches, food, entertainment and popularity more than we value our Lord.

Why would Satan want us to value riches, food, entertainment or popularity more than we value our Lord? Allow me to get a little bit philosophical with you. What makes your life valuable? Christians understand our lives are valuable because God loves us and says they are. He says they are important because he created us and he has saved us through the blood of his son. What makes my life valuable? What gives my life meaning? A Christian says it is God's love for me.

Now, take the perspective of someone who gets meaning and value from fame. What will they seek above all else? They will seek out fame at any cost because fame gives them purpose in life. Why are they so desperate for fame? People who gain value from fame want it because their fame gives them a reason to live. If they weren't famous they'd be a Joe or Sandy who is no different than anyone else struggling in obscurity. They wouldn't have people praising them and telling them they have value.

People in our celebrity obsessed culture believe their celebrity will give them meaning and purpose in life. Sadly, what is going to happen to you if you try to find meaning in the way others perceive you? **"Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives."**

God says people who turn away from him to seek meaning and value from riches or entertainment or popularity are cursed because they will never find true meaning in life from any of these things. Where can people find true meaning in life? Christians understand we find meaning and value in life because God says we matter to him. What will trusting in God's promises do for us? **"But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him."**

"He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." God says when we trust he gives us meaning in life we are going to be blessed. How will we be blessed? We will be blessed because we will understand the way our Lord looks at us and the reason he values us.

The Lord values us because he created us to love and serve him. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, didn't serve him. They chose to serve themselves and plunged the world into sin. This was unacceptable to God and in love sent Jesus to save us. Jesus lived his entire life without committing a sin. He willingly endured the pain and punishment of his passion when his perfect life on earth came to an end on the cross. Your eternal future is more valuable to Jesus than his own life.

God says when you trust this truth it makes you like a tree planted by a stream which isn't afraid of drought or a lack of water. It is a really neat way to picture the life of a Christian. There are going to be times in your life when everything is good and your life will be filled with green everywhere you look. Times when if someone asked you if your life was valuable to God that you wouldn't even hesitate to respond, "Absolutely!"

However, not all times in life are green. There will be times when your life is brown. Times when you battle the beast called depression. You know what God says. You know he says you matter and have value to him, but you don't feel that way. You feel worthless and worn. Your life feels empty and like you are simply going through the motions. You know what it is like to have drought in your life and be beaten on by excessive heat.

Or maybe your drought comes after you lost a job or your health. You know what you once had, but the prosperity you enjoyed seems like nothing more than a distant memory. What gets us through drought stricken times? **"But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."**

The Lord's promises are what carry Christians through tough times. The Lord's promises remind us nothing has changed in God's eyes in the way he views you. You're valuable in his eyes. You are still his child even if you are depressed or don't have a job or you're sick. Jesus still lived and died for you. God's love is the stream which keeps our faith green in the midst of trial and trouble. It is what allows us to bear fruit even in the midst of sorrow.

How can someone who is hurting and feels like they are in the middle of a desert still produce fruit? Your quiet confidence and trust signal you trust what God is doing. Your trust is fruit in God's eyes because other people (and your Lord) can see your confidence and trust in the promises God has made to you. This trust is the heart of a Christian's life. You can either trust in the Lord or face the consequences of rejecting him. I pray the Lord empowers you to display your trust in him. Amen.