

Homily for the 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 16-17, 2019

Readings: Jeremiah 17:5-8; 1 Corinthians 15:12,16-20; Luke 7:17.20-16

Preacher: Deirdre McKiernan Hetzler

In last week's homily, Gaynelle Wethers asked us to reflect on our response to God's call. This week, Jeremiah and Luke take that challenge to a new depth.

Jeremiah indicates there are only two opposite postures in life: placing one's confidence in the things and values of this world, or trusting in God.

Put that way, the choice seems like a no-brainer, doesn't it? Sometimes, though, might we get distracted or confused by the cacophony of voices around us? Perhaps tempted to cling to a worldview or situation that makes us feel secure?

In Jeremiah's day, God's chosen people had become distracted by events around them. Concerned about situations in their world, they made choices. And based on worldly wisdom, they made an unholy alliance. They were unfaithful to their relationship with God. Despite Yahweh's great love and care for them, they failed to trust—to listen for Yahweh's voice. Jeremiah knew they would soon be taken into exile in Babylon as a consequence of their choices.

Luke, like Matthew, speaks of blessings, which we call the Beatitudes. However, they wrote for different communities, appropriately tailoring their writing to their hearers. Luke's version is shorter than Matthew's, and more radical, combining blessings and woes. Luke also places his sermon later in Jesus' ministry, after several conflict stories. As if to give greater emphasis to his message.

Luke's Gospel is more radical in denouncing injustices. He often turns the accepted worldview upside down. The Beatitudes make this quite clear: God stands with the poor, hungry, weeping and persecuted. Jesus warns the comfortable and content that they ignore the needs of others at their own risk. God's passion to redress the plight of the struggling necessarily

involves judgment on those who prioritize their own comfort over the good of their brothers and sisters.

Jeremiah, Luke, and today's psalm declare blessed those whose lives are focused on God and who live dependent on, and trusting in, God.

I think of the woman who used her own money to put homeless people up in hotels during the recent polar vortex. Or the restaurateurs, churches, and others who fed furloughed federal workers. The journalists who tell the truth, sometimes with cameras, in the face of political disinformation. The police officer's mother who spoke out against the acquittal of officers who admitted their brutality against suspects. The many people who stand with immigrants and persons displaced by oppression and environmental degradation.

Who comes to mind for you?

We are not promised an easy life if we trust God. Things *will* go wrong. Some federal contractors *are* being denied missed pay. Folks providing water to immigrants crossing the desert *were* arrested. What God promises is that God will always be with us. The God who loves us beyond measure, who offers us a friendship like no other—*that God* will nurture us through adversity. And with our compassionate God, there is always grace and another chance to choose to trust.

We are not called to withdraw into what to this world appears safe, but to make a difference in a world full of darkness, fears, and violence. Made in God's image, we are so constituted that we *must* make a choice.

What will you and I choose?