

# “Words On The Word” - Week 14

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Reading the Readings with Revd Stephen Froggatt

## Sunday 21st June 2020

Lectionary Passages for Year A Ordinary 12 (see MWB p584):

**Old Testament:** Jeremiah 20:7-13

**Psalm:** Psalm 69:7-10, (11-15), 16-18

**Epistle:** Romans 6:1b-11

**Gospel:** Matthew 10:24-39

## Ordinary 12 - God in the Hardships

The passages set for today offer us some challenging reading. Jeremiah faces opposition to his prophecy about the impending destruction of Judah; the Psalmist cries out to God from a place of desolation and despair; Paul teaches us to distinguish between our old self and our new self; Jesus sends out the Twelve with stern words.

Yet in all of them we find the love, grace and mercy of God. Times were hard in the Exile, but God was there. The Psalmist had trusted God before and knows he can trust God again. We now live a life under grace, not under law - simultaneously both easier and harder than before. And when we too go out, making disciples of all nations, we need not fear, because however hard it is, God is with us in every step.

Let's look at these passages together.

*On the pages that follow, first come the four Bible readings on a single page, then the reflections on the readings, which begin on Page 3. Finally we have the Lectionary readings in full, in larger print.*

## **Jeremiah 20:7-13**

O LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughing stock all day long; everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. For I hear many whispering: "Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. "Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him." But the LORD is with me like a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonour will never be forgotten. O LORD of hosts, you test the righteous, you see the heart and the mind; let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.

## **Psalm 69:7-10, (11-15), 16-18**

It is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that shame has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my kindred, an alien to my mother's children. It is zeal for your house that has consumed me; the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.

*[When I humbled my soul with fasting, they insulted me for doing so. When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them. I am the subject of gossip for those who sit in the gate, and the drunkards make songs about me. But as for me, my prayer is to you, O LORD. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love, answer me. With your faithful help rescue me from sinking in the mire; let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters. Do not let the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the Pit close its mouth over me.]*

Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me. Do not hide your face from your servant, for I am in distress—make haste to answer me. Draw near to me, redeem me, set me free because of my enemies.

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## **Romans 6:1-11**

Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

## **Matthew 10:24-39**

A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household! So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

## Ordinary 12

### Jeremiah 20:7-13

### The Reluctant Prophet

Poor Jeremiah. As “God’s megaphone to a deaf world” (C. S. Lewis) his was a message of doom that was so harsh it brought him ridicule and ostracisation. Yet he can’t help it. He remembers his divine call, almost as if it were an irresistible force (“I was enticed”), and now he acknowledges that were he to try saying nothing, and not proclaiming God’s message, it would be “like a burning fire shut up in my bones”. He has to speak God’s word, and God’s word is not received well by those for whom it was sent.

Jeremiah lived at the hardest time to be a prophet, for his was the task to bring news of the destruction of Judah in 597 BC and the subsequent exile to Babylon. God’s people had already been ravaged by the Assyrians in 740 BC, with the Ten Tribes of Israel being taken away into captivity in the North. Now the remaining tribes of Judah, with their beloved Jerusalem, were facing impending destruction and exile to the South. Even Jerusalem, that impregnable City of God - that too would fall.

Prophetic voices still speak today - voices that rail against unjust and discriminatory governments; voices that cry out for equality and the welfare of fellow human beings; voices whose message is simply “This is not God’s way!” And who in their turn face ridicule and hostility for their efforts. Isn’t challenging injustice part of our calling as church?

### For reflection

- 1) Who are those in our society who continue the prophetic mission by bravely speaking God’s truth to power?**
- 2) How has the church helped or hindered these modern prophets?**
- 3) What is our calling, both as individuals and as a community of God?**
- 4) In what ways have we resisted the tasks to which we are called, as Jeremiah tries to do?**

As theologian Kate Collussy-Estes remarks,

*We all have moments, days, or weeks when we simply want to ask God, “What are you thinking?” or “Where are you?” Those are usually the times when we are feeling particularly picked on, as if, no matter what we say, no one—not even God—is listening. We can feel as though we have done all we are supposed to do, and still we are disconnected from both God and our community. The good news is that we are not alone in that feeling, because people of faith have struggled through such times for millennia.”*

This psalm is a psalm written in exile, by a people who feel as though their world has come apart. Yet rather than abandon their faith, these people are proclaiming it as the only thing they have left.

It is sadly a common tale to hear of people who have given up their faith, and severed all church contacts, because of a disaster in their life such as a sudden bereavement, or a perceived unanswered prayer. “I thought God was supposed to protect me!” they cry as they stomp away. Better theology, perhaps, might be seen in this psalm where the psalmist still screams at God for answers, but is also seen trusting in the One who is loving, merciful and able to draw near in our times of distress. For the psalmist, the extended lament is underwritten by a steadfast faith in the God who is also steadfast and faithful.

Kate Collussy-Estes reminds us that the experience of the psalmist echoes in one form or another through every generation. Perhaps it is suggesting that when life kicks our feet away, we should fall down on our knees.

**BIBLE STUDY: “Zeal for your house has consumed me” - where in the Gospels is that verse quoted?**

**DEVOTIONAL: Who among your friends might consider themselves included in the universality of human suffering, particularly those who feel that the suffering is unjust? What, if anything, might we even mean by “just” suffering? Let this psalm guide and inspire you as you pray for them now.**

What is the Gospel, in a nutshell? For Paul, it is justification for all by the faithfulness of one - Jesus Christ. The 'way of Adam' was life in which sin had the upper hand, even over death. The 'way of Christ' was life in which grace had the upper hand, even over death. The transformation from the former to the latter was the salvation offered by the death and resurrection of Jesus, the once-for-all atonement witnessed in the baptism of the new believer. Since this gift of grace was once-for-all, should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! So begins Paul's emphatic argument in this chapter.

In our baptism we shared the death of Christ on the cross. The water of baptism symbolised the closing over of the waters of death (as over the pursuing Egyptian chariots) and the darkness covering the whole land (Mark 15:33). This is then followed by the breaking of the waters (itself a sign of new life) and the bursting forth from the dead of the first Easter day. In your baptism you were declared dead (to sin) and then alive (in Christ).

We know that Christ will never die again - death has lost that power over him. By Christ's resurrection he declared that sin would never again have the upper hand. Since we too, as all Christian believers, have died to sin and are alive in Christ, we now walk 'in the light' - in newness of light.

Of course this doesn't mean that we will never sin again. All Christians sin. But to use a current phrase, the 'new normal' is a life of grace. The life you live now is a life of forgiveness, salvation and reconciliation. It is from that position of grace that you are called to live as Christ to others, not as Adam. As you love others as Christ loves you, you become even more like Christ.

Therefore you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive in Christ. We will undoubtedly sin again as frail human beings, but our goal is to live more like Christ each day.

**DEVOTIONAL / BIBLE STUDY:** In Galatians 3:27-29, Christ-believers are depicted as being "clothed with Christ" at their baptism. You are a "New creation" (2 Cor 5:17). If before you were lost and in despair, God's grace and mercy have brought you safely home.

As preachers we are called to comfort those who are challenged and challenge those who are comfortable. Surely this passage from Matthew offers one possible source of the maxim! For on the one hand Jesus is commissioning his disciples with words that could strike fear into their hearts: Do not fear those who kill the body; I have not come to bring peace but a sword; Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Then on the other hand he offers immense words of reassurance: Have no fear of them; Do not be afraid; Even the hairs of your head are all counted; Whoever will lose their life for my sake will find it. Challenge and comfort in equal measure - this must surely always be at the heart of our discipleship too.

Jesus never pretended to his disciples that there would be no persecution. Rather, he warned them that persecution would increase. Yet the disciples were emboldened by the resurrection of Jesus, just as he promised they would be, so they really did proclaim into the light and shout from the rooftops. The 'division of families' teaching served as a reminder that the old inherited model was no more - the Kingdom of God was breaking out and a radically new way of living, based on unconditional love not on family ties, was becoming the new normal.

We can then see how well this sits alongside the passage this week from Romans. Death is no longer to be feared for we have already died to sin and death no longer has power over us. We are now living under grace, walking in the light and by the power of the Spirit we proclaim God's love from the rooftops.

"Finding life" is surely the goal of everyone on the planet. Some seek it in wealth, some in careers, some in status or possessions. Jesus says that those who lose their life for his sake will find life. In other words, those who have died to self but who are now alive in Christ.

**REFLECT: In what ways can conflict be transformational?**

**BIBLE STUDY: Gather together the passages in which Jesus sends out the disciples. How do the Gospels differ?**

**DEVOTIONAL: You too are a Disciple (learner) and an Apostle (one who is sent). Ask God to strengthen you by the Holy Spirit for each part of your calling.**

## Readings for Today

### Old Testament Reading

O LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed.

I have become a laughing stock all day long; everyone mocks me.

For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, "Violence and destruction!"

For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long.

If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.

For I hear many whispering: "Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!"

All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. "Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him."

But the LORD is with me like a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail.

They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed.

Their eternal dishonour will never be forgotten.

O LORD of hosts, you test the righteous, you see the heart and the mind; let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.

Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD!

For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.

*Jeremiah 20:7-13 (NRSV)*

## Psalm

It is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that shame has covered my face.

I have become a stranger to my kindred, an alien to my mother's children.

It is zeal for your house that has consumed me; the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.

*[When I humbled my soul with fasting, they insulted me for doing so.*

*When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them.*

*I am the subject of gossip for those who sit in the gate, and the drunkards make songs about me.*

*But as for me, my prayer is to you, O LORD.*

*At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love, answer me.*

*With your faithful help rescue me from sinking in the mire; let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters.*

*Do not let the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the Pit close its mouth over me.]*

Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.

Do not hide your face from your servant, for I am in distress—make haste to answer me.

Draw near to me, redeem me, set me free because of my enemies.

*Psalm 69:7-10, (11-15), 16-18 (NRSV)*



## Epistle

Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

*Romans 6:1-11 (NRSV)*

## Gospel

“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

For I have come to set a man against his father,  
and a daughter against her mother,  
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;  
and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

*Matthew 10:24-39 (NRSV)*