

"A Pride Sermon – or Suffering"
The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost or Pride Sunday
Proper 7
Trinity+Saint Peter's Episcopal Church
25 June 2023

Jeremiah 20:7-13
Psalm 69
Romans 6:1b-11
Saint Matthew 10:24-39

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Today is Pride Sunday, at least here in this city. In other places it is celebrated at various times during the month of June. The Pride that is celebrated on this day is related to those who have pride in their sexuality, often in the face of hatred or dismissal by others. This is a situation that has not only been faced by gay men and women, but by men and women in a great number of situations. In the readings we wrestle with Jeremiah who feels that he has been seduced by God, and dismissed by his neighbors. In the psalm we hear the lament of Jew who have been tormented by the Greek Seleucid kings who sought to Hellenize them, forcing them to abandon their ancient covenant with Yahweh. In Romans, Paul talks about our dealing with death, and taking on a new life in baptism. Finally in Matthew, Jesus urges us to abandon all, and to accept and to follow him. Let's take a moment and look at each of these.

The Seduction of Jeremiah

John Bright entitles this pericope, "Jeremiah in Tension with His Calling." Our reading's translation reads, "*O Lord, you have enticed me.*" Bright's translation has a similar flavor, highlighting the captivating nature of Jeremiah's argument with God, "You seduced me, Yahweh, and I let you; you seized and overcame me." Jeremiah has been put (or put himself) in a difficult situation. In the eleventh verse we see the thorn Jeremiah has placed in Judah's side. The Lord commanded that Jeremiah go to the Potsherd gate, and to break a bottle with the imprecation of verse 11, "Thus will I smash this people and this city." It was common in many ancient near eastern cultures to use imprecation texts such as this, write them on a pottery jar, and then smash them. The result of this act is that he is struck by the priest Pashhur, and put into the stocks. The poem that follows this scene is our reading for today. It is about inner turmoil and reluctance to follow God's call. In the *de Profundis* that follows in verses fourteen to eighteen, Jeremiah echoes Job's cry, "Cursed be the day whereon I was born." Jeremiah is persecuted for speaking God's word to that time and that place. This is the true meaning of prophecy. It is not a view into the future as in looking into a crystal ball, but rather speaking God's will and word to the now. What might our preachers' words be to our time? What difficult words are we called to speak?

The Suffering of the Psalmist

Reading through the verses of this psalm, which describe the ignominy meted out to the psalmist in his or her present situation, we can see how they might apply to Jesus as well. Here, we can see their relationship to Jeremiah's mission and then suffering. This is a psalm of lament, which at verse thirty turns into a thanksgiving. In his commentary, Artur Weiser notes that some have felt that this particular psalm was influenced by the Jeremiah incident, but it is more likely to come from the time of the Seleucid kings, when attempts were made to Hellenize the Jews. The opening line ties God's call to the subsequent sufferings, "*Surely, for your sake have I suffered reproach.*" One wonders if we as prophets, preachers, and followers of the Way, have not "suffered reproach". The question that we face on this Pride Sunday is are we really preaching the folly of the Gospel? Do we preach a gospel of hope and good news to those whom the rest of society shuns and dismisses?

Facing Death and Reality

Please excuse me for a rather personal aside. This verse reminds me of a time when I had a conversation with my father (a Lutheran pastor) and my mother about my homosexuality. When I offered that I thought that my faith had grown a great deal along with my struggling with my sexual orientation, my father replied with this line from today's reading: "*Should we continue in sin in order that grace might abound?*" The difficulty for me was that my life in Christ, in the various graces given to me, had led me to know that the grace was sufficient – that it was given to me as a gay man.

I am reminded here, especially, of Luther's comments on Baptism,

"What then is the significance of such a baptism with water?

It signifies that the old person in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily sorrow for sin and through repentance, on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." [2]

The question that humankind has had to live with from creation onwards is one about death. Can we live without it? Or, must we all recognize that we live within the bounds of death – it is a part of living. Here Paul links death with Baptism and the death of Christ. Luther saw that in the new person rising from the death of sleep each day – called to be a new person. Thus the man, the woman linked with Christ, enters into the body by means of a baptismal death, and rises with Christ then each day. Now, what do we do with the sin part? Paul wants us to be dead to sin, but alive in Christ. It is the synecdoche of Christian life, living with death, dying to live. It is what is common with all of us, regardless of our situation. So let us invite all to live in God's grace.

Divisions

This material in Matthew follows on Jesus' discourse to the disciples on being in mission. As we have learned from the Jeremiah reading and Psalm 69, there are consequences to following Jesus, and being in mission with him. Jesus tries to prepare the disciples for those eventualities. Unlike Matthew, Mark places Jesus' teaching in the context of the Passion. Suffering in mission is a part of the Passion of Jesus. In Matthew these warnings follow the commissioning of the disciples – early on.

What follows are a series of comparisons: the hidden and the revealed, the darkness and the light, the whispered and the shouted, killing the body, killing the soul. This is the radical nature of the mission and Gospel of Jesus – there is to be fundamental change. Such change might instill fear, but Jesus encourages them. “*Do not be afraid,*” is repeated to clarify the point. On this Pride Sunday we all are called to face our fears, to rejoice in what God has given us.

Jesus continues in this vein with an antipode on peace and the sword. In Matthew this saying may have a special significance in that Matthew reflects the Christian community divided from the Jewish community in the Levant. Jesus did cause division, and the description of families being divided against one another was not just a metaphor but also a reality. As people living real lives we understand the division and suffering in families, often in conjunction with the realities of our own lives and consequences. This theme of opposites continues with the final saying about taking up the cross and losing life. Wrestling with this in our time may be quite beneficial to the church. No, it has been beneficial to the church, to women, to foreigners and strangers, to the followers of other religions, to gay men and women, to children, to the whole of humanity. *Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.* That is the heart of pride!

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