

Sunday Next Before Advent-2019

Jer. 23: 5-8

Jo. 6: 5-14

+In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen+

I do not know if you have ever run across the word—jeremiad. It has gone out of use, but at one time was a frequent visitor in the “King’s English”, particularly during the period of the founding of this country. It refers to a long literary work, usually in prose in which the author goes on and on lamenting the state of society or the moral laxity that has overrun a people. Normally it is angry in tone with a good bit of invective and nearly always predicts the society’s imminent downfall; A bit like listening to a steady diet of MSNBC and FOX news. HOWEVER, the origin of the word itself should come as no surprise—It is derived from the prophet Jeremiah. (The O.T. eeyore) As Frederick Buechner in his book Peculiar Treasures states, “There was nothing in need of denunciation that Jeremiah didn’t denounce. He denounced the king and the clergy. He denounced recreational sex and jamborees. He denounced the rich for exploiting the poor and denounced the poor for deserving no better. He denounced the way every new god (meaning every new religious trend) had the people sniffing around them right up to the gates of the Temple. He even denounced God himself for saddling Jeremiah with the job of trying to reform such a pack of hyenas and degenerates... You have deceived me, he says to God” Perhaps most difficult of all, when Israel went into exile they dragged old J with them kicking and screaming all along the way. Nevertheless, Jeremiah knew that what captures the hearts of a people captures their loyalty, their ethics, their visions and their hopes.

There is a descriptive phrase that captures this; “if there is nothing above/beyond us, we will be consumed by all that is around us.” Another way of saying it is that if there is no ultimate goal and vision for life we will wander aimlessly.

Today we come full circle to the end of the Church year, and to the Sunday before Advent, or as it is now commonly called; Christ the King. Like so many endings in life it is really the beginning because it points us to exactly what we are looking for; the One who is above us, with us, and holds up for us the goal and destination of true life. As T.S. Eliot wrote, “We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.” So, it is fitting for us to take a moment and look back over the year to recall what has been “served up” for our partaking. We have walked through Advent with its longing and hope for God to be active in the world. Christmas, the great festival of the Incarnation, gave us a taste of the God who enters our history and lives with us. Epiphany has given us an opportunity to see Jesus for what he really is. Lent has offered us the depth of tasting the God who knows our struggles and suffering because He has been in them, and Easter is the main course for in it God delivers us from our greatest fear, death. The ensuing time has been one of parables and teaching, healing and grace, and the offer to be enriched in our walk with Jesus. All, all of these point to one thing; the Kingdom and Reign of God which stands among us and above all other kingdoms. We are invited to be citizens and full participants of that reign rather than settling for poorly prepared substitutes. If there is nothing above us, we will be consumed by all that is around us.”

Sometimes it is easier to know and see what the Kingdom of God is not. Today we have heard from the prophet Jeremiah, or as I sometimes call him; old sad sack. He was perennially disappointed with his lot in life, but more with the conditions he witnessed around him. We can

understand that. There have been those times when attending worship when the preacher describes the pain, suffering, and sin in our world, and I have thought to myself; that is true, but I wish it weren't. The prophet Jeremiah speaks to a time very like our own. Judah is on the verge of disintegration. He has witnessed the high points with King Josiah and now the low with Zedekiah. Some have already been carted off into exile with the resulting loss of home, kin, land, and comfort. The economic welfare of the nation is at an all-time low, and military threat is at their very borders. As this is happening, the very people who are "in charge" and carry the mantle of leadership use the ensuing chaos and fear to profiteer, manipulate and stretch the laws of justice in order to extract power and wealth for themselves. Justice, that is God's Righteousness, is lost in the quest of human greed and avarice. The very King, who is to serve as a shepherd for a nation, is up to his neck in misdeeds. Judah has a king, but has lost kingship, that is, guidance, faithfulness, and hope. It is a familiar story lived out over and over again in human history. We live in a time where war rather than peace has become the earmark for many. We have watched political leaders from both major parties be indicted and convicted of criminal actions. Nearly 60,000 children starve to death daily on a planet that has the resources to end hunger, but chooses not to do so. This is not what the Kingdom of God looks like. If there is nothing above us, we will be consumed by all that is around us."

In the very midst of these conditions Jeremiah offers a word of hope. He tells his people and us that God will be with his people and deliver us all. Their rescue from Egypt is only the beginning. God will act to transform creation and history by offering a King who is less like a tyrant and more like a shepherd, and we have seen Him. He is the one who feeds 5,000 with what appear to be miniscule resources, but he refuses to abandon them—"nothing will be lost". He is the One who transcends political systems, because they pale in what they can offer compared to his overcoming sin and death. He is the One who offers the power of love over the weakness of hatred. His is a Kingdom that does not derive its models of justice from the failed systems of oppression and manipulation. This is a Kingdom where the poor, unacceptable, the hurting and outcasts, people like you and me, are welcomed and made full participants.

The idea of a King seems strange and foreign to us who live in a democracy. We are suspicious of such language and the regimes we associate with rulers. But know this; there will be some lord over life. There will be some vision and image of what directs, sustains, and empowers us. The question is what will, or more accurately, Who will that look like? I am pretty sure the Kingdom of God is not simply puritan morality, better homes and gardens, middle-class values and respectability wrapped in one economic or political system or another. "My kingdom is not OF this world" does not suggest escaping the world. It means it is more than anything we can create using our own devices. It is not being consumed by all that is around us. It is being lead and guided by the One who chose to show Kingship by serving, by loving, and by enduring suffering in order to show us the will of God. This King asks for our allegiance for he relies on us and the gift of our hearts and souls in order to reveal the Kingdom. This is the vision of the Kingdom where those who hunger and thirst will be filled. This is the image of the Kingdom which guides us as Christians to the future. This is the King which stands above and with us so that the powers of this world will not have a grip on us. Amen+