

Epiphany 6, Year C – February 13, 2021 Luke 6:17-26
Epiphany, Winnipeg
Rev. Paul Sartison

In case you hadn't noticed, these are divided times. I was going to sum up the situation with smart comments about trucks and borders and people who have nothing good to say about the humans in the trucks, and so on...

But I'll spare myself the effort and spare you the words and let these words that were posted on Facebook by a friend of mine, having first been posted by a friend of theirs, and first posted or written by a friend of theirs on Instagram. The origin of such things is often unclear, but that's OK:

"I know our world wasn't perfect to begin with, but I find it so heartbreaking when I think about how, over the span of about two years, we've gone from people singing randomly from their balconies as a way of lifting their own spirits and the spirits of those around them, to a time where our world has become so tense, so divided, so polarized and sometimes, just so downright hateful. I don't know exactly how we got here, and I sure don't know of any easy way back out, but I hope we figure things out soon. I really don't like it here."

There you go. These are divided times. And I know that I can't stand back and wag my finger at someone about causing the division, because I have sat in the company – maybe the company of scoffers, as the Psalm we just read together says – and we've said all kinds of nasty things about those people who don't see things the same way that we do. This pandemic time started out with its own kind of strange hint of healing, and I and others I know were saying all kinds of good things about politicians we'd never in a million years vote for because we were all on the same side for a change, but now we've lost something, and we'll say nasty things about a stranger who is somebody's beloved son or mother or cousin or friend who we see on a screen or in a paper.

It strikes me then that these readings for today are a bit of a problem, because they are the kinds of things that could just feed these divisions if we're not careful.

We heard first from the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah is writing to a nation of people who find themselves living in exile; carried away to live in a far away country while what's left of their own country slowly decays. They're losing their home, their country, and their freedom. Jeremiah insists, and he insists that God insists, that the people have gotten themselves into this problem because they have run after idols and they have not been just with each other. Some of the powerful ones among them insist that it's not their fault but it's the fault of people like Jeremiah, and he gets thrown in a pit and eventually hauled off to another place for his own exile. It's your fault; no, it's your fault. And Jeremiah says, "Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals, in human laws, in politics and in power. Blessed are those who trust in the Lord." The good guys, the bad guys, the split, you see how that can feed what we're doing right now?

Then we read the Psalm, the very first one, and the very last words we said together right out loud were, "For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall be destroyed." The righteous and the wicked, can you see can happen? These are divided times, and even our own scripture can have such a divided way of speaking. Even Jesus, speaking on the wide open prairie to his followers there: "Blessed are you who seem to have lost everything. Woe to you who thought you had it all."

These are divided times we live in.

But notice this, and if you're not quite sure take a minute after worship is over and read through it all again. Jeremiah 17, Psalm 1, Luke 6. No one ever really says, "This is how you tell the good people from the bad people." There's no list that says that the ones who do this and this and that are wicked, and the ones who think this and believe that and do the same are righteous. And even Jesus doesn't actually say "Blessed are the good people, and cursed are the bad." He just says that the ones who seem to be losing it all will taste goodness and life, and the ones who seem to have it all will lose it all, even if that time doesn't come until we draw our last breath. We know that that's true.

It's not really about who the good people are or who the bad people are. All of these things that we read and said and heard this morning really just do one thing: They call us back to the place where our roots are sunk deeply and fed. The writer of the Psalm points to the teaching of God: It's like a stream of water that soaks into our roots and plants us firmly in the ground, and it feeds the fruit that we produce, and keeps us from withering and drying up. It keeps the life in our life.

Jeremiah picks up the same theme and we see that our life is in God, and our roots reach deeply into that water and it feeds us and keeps us going when things just get too heated – like when the tension heats up between people who don't agree - and it carries us along through drought, even these dry spells when the capacity to care seems to wither, and it's really hard to love...and it's hard even to feel loved. We are brought back again by stories and poems written in times of exile and division; brought back to our God who is like a stream that flows, always flows, always fresh, always refreshing. And we're called to sit by that fresh stream, and let our roots settle into that water of life...settle into that baptismal water where we taste fully and freely, and where our roots are always planted.

And when we're called back to all those waters we remember that our life comes from our God, not from our being right or wrong. Our life together has its roots sunk deeply in the water of baptism: water that made us one long before we could divide ourselves into two or three or more. Our roots are not planted in a faction or a party or a philosophy or a protest sign or an argument. Our roots are planted in this water of the one who gives us life. Our roots are planted in Christ, whose resurrection promises that our life will be made new. Here, and now.

It doesn't promise us an easy way out of whatever mess we're in. But it's a better place to start – with our roots in that one water that always promises to give life for us all.

Those waters are already doing their thing. Here's the latest list of names of people who liked that Facebook post: Breanne, Leanne, Theo, Brenda, Brittany, Patricia, Cheryl, Steve, Chris, Kristoffer, Karen, Tyler, Elizabeth, Cathy, Sarah, MJ, David, Steven, Marie, Dennis, Mary Ann, Matthew, Iris, David, Marc, Heidi, Janet, Lynn, Allan, Kelly, Margaret, Rick, Michelle, Larry, Tim, Tracy, Lionel, Mike. I know all those people, and I know that some of them would have a hard time sitting down and having a civil conversation about everything going on in our country today. A few of these people might be most at home in a Freedom Convoy in Ottawa or Winnipeg or Emerson, and quite a few more would be most at home telling those others to go home. A few who are on the same side would have a hard time talking about it without turning up the heat because they're on different sides of the same side. And a few would be most at home being at home and grumbling about the whole thing. But they all like this idea of the hate being taken away, and the heat being turned down, and of all of us finding our way together again.

Those waters are already doing their thing. Even a list of likes on a screen bears witness and calls us back to the one water that feeds and sustains us and calls us back together and is making us one again.

AMEN.