

June 25, 2017  
Pentecost 3  
Lament and Growth  
Jeremiah 20:7-13; Psalm 69:7-18; Romans 6:1b-11 (LBW #189); Matthew 10:24-39  
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Fellow Ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ.  
Gracia y paz de Dios; Padre, Hijo e Espíritu Santo.  
Grace and peace from God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Did you notice a change on the altar last week and today? We will be seeing the color green for a loooooong time. We have entered the long growing season of the church year.

After seven months of celebrating festival after festival The glory of Christ the King Sunday, Advent, Christmas, Epiphany and transfiguration. Holy Week and Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost and Holy Trinity. We now enter the long season in which we try to catch our breath before the festivals begin again in November.

So...time to kick back and relax, right? Wrong! This is the season of planting and growing. in our fields and gardens and in our life as disciples of Jesus Christ. That's why the liturgical color is green...

This is the season when we put the lessons of the festivals into action. This is the season when we learn what it really means to be disciples ...ministers of the gospel. This is the season when we bear fruit.

Growth is often uncomfortable, even painful. My 6-year-old grandson in the midst of a growth spurt. In fact we are pretty sure he grew overnight one night last week. He woke up in the morning grumpy and out of sorts. He was tripping over things that he never tripped over before. His body was different than it had been the day before.

Growing in faith and discipleship can be uncomfortable and even painful. One day we are celebrating festivals that even the secular world recognizes and suddenly we find ourselves in this puzzling and unrecognized season of Pentecost.

What are we supposed to do or say about faith in these days? The culture around us does not even notice the quiet growth. Our neighbors, friends, family are busy planning their hectic summers filled with vacations, weekend trips to the beach or camping. And here we are Sunday after Sunday morning sitting inside this building learning how to be disciples of Jesus Christ in the midst of a society that ridicules, ignores and even persecutes those who proclaim the gospel.

There is much to learn about discipleship from today's texts. Jeremiah was a young prophet at the time of the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem in the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. He warned the Israelites about the coming doom at the hands of the Babylonians but the Israelites would not listen. Instead, they laughed at him, they ridiculed him, beat him and stuffed him into a clay jar, all in an effort to silence his dire warnings that they did not want to hear.

In the midst of this crisis, he voices his lament. He complains to God, I'm doing what you asked of me and it's a pain! It would have been better had I not been born than have to live through this kind of vocational hell.

The writer of Psalm 69 complains to God about the suffering, shame, estrangement, insults, gossip and ridicule he is enduring even though the writer has done all that God has asked. Jesus, in this gospel text lays it out clearly to the disciples, to us, really that this business of proclaiming the gospel is NOT going to be easy.

Today's gospel words are part of Jesus' instruction to the disciples as he sends them on their first mission trip. He has trained them and they are ready to head out into the world. He assures them that they have everything they need to share the good news.

Beware, though, Jesus warns, this good news generates hostility and resistance in the public square. This gospel of Jesus Christ is anathema to the powerful and privileged today, just as it was 2000 years ago. Jesus sends us out to feed the hungry, clothe the naked free the oppressed, and to walk beside the immigrant. In other words, we are to announce the kingdom of God has come near. The kingdom of God is different from the kingdom of this world. The kingdom of God includes the immigrant and the refugee, the black lives and the brown lives. The kingdom of God is justice and righteousness, GOD'S justice and righteousness . . . not ours.

And Jesus makes this disturbing announcement: "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

Wait! What? Didn't Jesus tell his disciple in the garden to put away the sword? What sword does Jesus bring? He brings the sword of justice. He brings the sword of truth. He brings the sword of mercy and grace. Jesus wields that sword against the Empire that would neglect the vulnerable, the poor, the immigrant and the marginalized. And Jesus was met with hostility and deadly resistance from the privileged of the Empire.

We will be met with the same. When we challenge the status quo that says white, patriotic America is the kingdom into which all must assimilate, we will be mocked, ridiculed, arrested and worse. We who answer God's call for justice are on the edge of despair, doubting that anything will ever change. What words of hope are we to proclaim in the midst of this despair?

Jesus assures us that we don't need to write down or practice what to say. The words will come by the power of the Holy Spirit. The words will not be pleasing to the ear of Empire, nor will they be what our friends and family want to hear. Jesus tells us that this gospel will divide families and friends and nations.

Confronted with such division for the sake of the gospel what is our response? Do we demand that the outsiders assimilate to our way of doing things? Do we ignore the plight of the immigrants and refugees who have fled from their homes in fear of death and persecution? Do we blame the victims of violence, rape, excessive police force, economic oppression, saying "if only they would fill in the blank?"

Paul gives us the answer in his letter to the Roman Christians. We no longer live in sin or fear. We live in God's kingdom of grace and mercy. Grace and mercy for EVERYONE! Sin is drowned in baptism and we are raised to new life in Christ. Baptism is the water that nurtures deep roots that produce abundant fruit.

You feed and water your gardens . . . So we are fed at this table and watered by the flood of baptism. That doesn't guarantee a weed-less garden. God can and does hear our fears, doubts, anger and anxiety.

In this long growing season of Pentecost God deepens and strengthens the roots of our faith so that we are able to tell the good news of Jesus Christ to everyone we meet no matter their ethnic origin, economic status or gender identity. In this long growing season of Pentecost God nurtures the fruit of faith within us, emboldening us to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, open your hearts, open your minds, open your doors . . . share the good news.

Thanks be to God.