

**SERMON:** *“Blessings and Woes.”*

Rev. Geoff Ross, Sunday, February 13, 2022, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

*[LW:Call of the Disciples – If we’re called to follow:are we? This week’s reading ask/challenge us:what path are we on/taking?]*

The Jerimiah reading – subtitled: *“Sin and Punishment”*! – doubles down on the on the cost of our waywardness/going astray/drift from trust/faithfulness:Basically/bluntly the Prophet warns that sin equals death – a hard/miserable/torturous life ending in a dark/lonely desolate death. But, *“Blessed are those who trust in the Lord/trust IS the Lord. They shall be like tress planted by water”* – they shall not be *“anxious”* and will *“not cease to bear fruit.”*(Jer 17:7-8) In what amounts to a ‘tough love’ message for the People of God – exiled from the Promised Land/homes/livelihoods/loved ones, even God(it seemed) – the only question for Jerimiah was, which path/choice were/are the exiles/People of God/we/you/me going to choose? Were they/are we going to choose to live a life in a desert of despair/drought/death in which every choice was a struggle of lesser evils, or were they/are we going to choose to live life rooted in the sustaining/nourishing/enduring/steadfast presence of God – even in the midst of trial/testing/trouble? For Jerimiah a heart that would turn away from God was *“like a shrub in the desert/salt land”*, constantly parched seeking water/relief that will never come/be found.(Jer 17:6) Sound familiar? The alternative to this faithless heart in Jerimiah’s vision is a tree – the symbol of life/vitality/fruitfulness – rooted by a river without fear/anxiety, even in times of distress.

*[Moses:Deut 30 – last “sermon” to the PofG/lays out the hard facts;Two ways:1 leads to death/other to life – exhorts them/us:choose life! “Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”(Deut 30:19b-20) This is the promise!/God’s hope for us!]*

Which leads us to the Psalm. Right from the beginning of the Book of Psalms – sung by the People of God to remind them of what they/we believe/understand to be true/self-evident – today’s Psalm makes it clear: their/our lives are not theirs/ours/self-owned, it is a gift to be used/lived in/to the glory/enjoyment of God; and that there is a binary choice when it comes to how we are to live our lives/life/faith. Summarized by the sub-title – *“The Two Ways”* – the Psalmist’s metaphor shows us a forked path: the *“way of the righteous”* or the *“way of the wicked”*(Ps 1:6) – one leads to life(again the image of a tree planted by a stream/yielding fruit/without want), the other to a dried out/dehydrated death. The Psalm itself is a path offering us a choice:choose one of two ways; life/death, blessings/woes. Here’s a hint: God’s Law/s – that’ll separate us *“like chaff that the wind drives away”*(Ps 1:4) – and how we live up to it/it out, will be what God judges us by.

The psalmist sings that *“happy are those who [find] their delight in the law of the Lord”* – on which the *“meditate day and night.”*(Ps 1:1-2) The word *“delight”* speaks of the deeper – down-in-your-bones joy/pleasure/satisfaction of knowing that you’re in the right place/made/loved where/to be/for-who you are. This ‘peace’ is found in God’s Law/s. Rather than a list of rules/restrictions/prohibitions, God’s Law/s are instructions/framework/prescription to live out our/your/my created potential/purpose happy/blessed/present with God. In this interpretation of God’s Law – as guidance in/to/for living *“the way of the righteous”*/those seek/thrive/live out God’s kingdom – are the *“better way”* that Paul wrote/spoke about when he wrote about the *“gift of love.”*(1 Cor 12:31). And this is what Jesus offers to the desperate/diseased/dejected people who all came to crowd/press in/touch Jesus.

Today's Gospel reading continues Luke's account of Jesus' ministry along the north shore of the Sea of Galilee – today, we heard its version of the 'Sermon on the Mount' and its unequivocal/uncompromising declaration of the nature of God's kingdom. After formally 'choosing' the disciples, we're told that Jesus spends the day healing all who came to Him. In the midst of this demonstration of God's saving power/healing grace/redeeming love, Jesus turns to His disciples and draws a line from the God's Law to the Prophets/Psalmists to Him/His ministry/mission by repeating how God's 'Law'/kingdom/economy works. It was both shocking and revolutionary to their/our ears then/now! Jesus' message inverts our expectations/understanding of how this/our fallen world 'works' by describing a better place/kingdom/way in which the weak/poor/lost/diseased are lifted up and those who lived off others/failed to live according to God's Laws will be cast down.

*[Indiana Jones Last Crusade: Holy Grail – Knight Templar: Choose wisely!]*

Having declared that He came to bring Good News/release/sight to the poor/captives/blind, Jesus now lays out what fulfilling God's plan/way will look like by declaring that those who have left everything to follow Him will be blessed/those who do not/haven't/didn't won't. Friends, right from the beginning of the journey of discipleship, Jesus/God tells us the truth that faithful living will require everything: our lives/all of us/ourselves – without reservation/restriction. Those who do will know God's joy/delight/blessings – will inherit the kingdom of God; woe to those who don't. The message is clear: to be disciples is to follow in this way; to be blessed by God is to have nothing but God. Amen.