

Meditative Reflections (28June2020)

Jeremiah 28:5-9

On my first trip to Palestine, we were with an Anglican priest from Nablus as guide when we hit an inexplicable Israeli road block, right in the middle of the road, within Palestinian territory!

It was clear the young soldiers with massive guns were only there to be obstacles. First they offered to let us pass without Father Ibrahim. Then they said he could go, but not us. Totally nonsensical and the frustrations of daily life for Palestinians.

In devotions and reflections that evening, one group member was pleased with himself for going up to those Israeli soldiers and saying “shalom,” the Hebrew greeting for peace.

Well, I was spitting mad that he wanted to whitewash over the injustice and put on a smiling face. I knew the prophet Jeremiah railed against those who would say “peace, peace” when there is no peace (6:14, 8:11).

Sometimes we need to name injustice. We need to be honest about the difficulties. Jeremiah spoke of pestilence against many countries, even great ones. We certainly know lots of this today, in the spreading death of coronavirus. Prophetic voices remind our society that Black Lives Matter. We cannot ignore climate disruption. We need to be able to grieve, honest that our lives are not perfectly right.

It would be nice if it were better. But glossing past it with a quick “shalom” won’t do, claiming “peace, peace” when there is no peace. Sometimes we need to lament and can only begin by saying, “Kyrie. Good Lord, have mercy.”

Jeremiah said not to, but we do look for and listen for the prophet of peace. Joyce Anderson skipped to that in Bible study this week and wanted to hear more about where the prophet for peace is. It’s what we yearn for.

Mary Rowe asked if it was fulfilled in Jesus. It’s not that Jesus stopped calling out the oppressors or striving for justice. He did know the brutality of war. In the passage right before today’s

Gospel, Jesus said he came to bring not peace but a sword. But we know him as the Prince of Peace. We expect to find balm and ease for our burdens and peace at the last. Scripture says the peace of God “surpasses all understanding” (Phil4:7). Jesus himself says that he has peace the world cannot give (John14:27).

I’m not sure what the right answer is, including between the prophet Jeremiah preaching war and Jesus bringing peace. I know where I want to fall. And I trust the words of a hymn that say,

When our song says peace and the world says war, we will sing despite the world. We will trust the song, for we sing of God, who breaks the spear and sword and stills the storm of war.

When our song says free and the world says bound, we will sing despite the world. We will trust the song, for we sing of God, who opens prison doors and sets the captives free. (ELW 709)

We’ll say in our statement of faith, “The resurrection of Jesus is a reality that is beyond our comprehension; it cannot be explained rationally, but it opens up an uncharted horizon. Sickness, violence and death no longer have the last word.”*

So we do look for and listen for and speak peace. We find it to share. In spite of it all, we know what more to expect.

Romans 6:12-23

The wages of sin is death.

We use this translation for seeming a smidge more understandable, but we missed out on the classic phrase, with us in English 400 years from the King James up to our typical New Revised Standard Version: the wages of sin is death. “Sin pays off with death,” we just heard.

With a free market economy, wages make sense to us. Our next reading has language of reward, like it’s what you deserve or earn. We are accustomed to getting what we pay for and paying for what we get, and we think that includes minimum wage workers or CEOs who increase the value of a company.

What you deserve... Sin pays off with death. That may connect with the prophet Jeremiah.

* https://www.taize.fr/en_article27804.html

(That's prophet, not profit.) We're slaves to sin, and it keeps paying off with violence, sickness, and death. It's a brutally hard fact these days that pestilence is paying off. The virus spreads with our refusal to listen to life-giving suggestions. Lifestyles put other lives at risk. Some choices have bad consequences.

Notice that Romans doesn't tell you to choose better. It's not to work harder for improved wages. It's not that you find your way to something that will pay more and pay off in the end. Romans recognizes we're trapped. That's what slavery is.

Instead, it breaks apart the market economy for God's gift economy. When you were trapped in death, the free gift of God is life in Christ Jesus.

Again, when the world says war we don't say peace because we're so diligent and hard-working. It's because God doesn't work in our economy, doesn't operate in our systems, won't abandon you to get what you deserve, instead gives gifts of just what you need.

Matthew 10:40-42

This nice little passage, is probably best served without too many words in response.

We've heard three weeks in a row from this chapter of Matthew, of Jesus sending out disciples, "to make their lives radiate the hope of peace on earth and a wholeness for all creation."*

You are sent with good news. And it is good news even that you are a representative of Jesus. He refills and refreshes you and associates himself with you so strongly, so deeply, so fully, that Jesus himself goes where you do.

You may embody it as a prophet, speaking honestly of a present situation, not playing favorites or giving the undeserved blessings of shalom, a prophet who doesn't offer faint hope merely to say, "aw, it's gonna be okay. No big deal." You may fully recognize the problems, but be a prophet of peace beyond understanding, from God alone.

You may embody it as a righteous person, the same word in the Bible as justice. That means God's justice, not the exchange rates of our society and economy, not the wages that depress and

enslave and kill, but God's freely given justice for life.

You may embody it in no impressive way at all. Even little ones, without grand abilities, without deep theology, with the faint glimmer of trust and hope, are claimed with grand gifts associated with Jesus. You'll be part of blessing the world with what it deserves in God's eyes—gifts!—even as a little one, the minimal one could be considered a Christian, unfit hardly to be called an apostle, but still a means of extending God's blessing. You.