

**Jeremiah 17:5-10    Luke 6:17-26**  
**Who can we trust??**

The prophet Jeremiah had some good news, and some bad news for his fellow Israelites. According to Luke, so did Jesus.

Jeremiah delivered this message from God, "By your own act you shall lose the heritage [birthright] that I gave you ... for you have kindled my anger and it will burn forever." [Jeremiah 17:4a,c] Clearly, that was the bad news.



It seemed that the Israelites had forgotten that Yahweh had rescued them from bondage in Egypt. They had abandoned Yahweh's holy law and had chased after the gods of foreigners. Even in times of danger and disaster, they didn't turn to Yahweh, their redeemer. Rather they turned to their enemies and tried to make treaties with them.

Self-sufficiency, self-reliance – these seemed to be the order of the day. Through Jeremiah, God tries to bring them back. Jeremiah tries to help his fellow Israelites see the folly, the self-destructiveness of their ways. To make his point, he uses a metaphor of trees and shrubs. He contrasts the tree, capable of surviving droughts, with the shrub, which shrivels up in tough times. Those who trust in themselves and human alliances, he says, are like tumbleweeds, rootless, chaff blown this way and that by every breeze. But those who trust in the Lord, he says, are like the tree that can not be swayed by challenge, nor wilted by doubt, nor stripped bare by adversity. The lives of those who put all their confidence in Yahweh would not be without struggle, sorrow, pain. But these would know the strength of Yahweh, hope and joy. Indeed they would be like the tree that even "in a year of drought ... never fails to bear fruit." [Jeremiah 17:8d]

Bad news! Good news! "Cursed is the one who trusts in human strength ... blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,"

In the Gospel of Luke, we find a version of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and it pulls no punches, minces no words. There are blessings - "Blessed are you who are poor ... Blessed are you who hunger now, ... Blessed are you who weep now, ... Blessed are you when others hate you ... because you stand firm with me ..." And there are curses - "woe to you who are rich, ... Woe to you who are well fed now, ... Woe to you who laugh now, ... Woe to you when others speak well of you,"

What, oh what was Jesus saying? Even the blessings could be seen as curses to us!

With considerable urgency, Jeremiah and Jesus are trying to illustrate that any deep sense of blessing, of joy, can never be found in the things that the world values. They are challenging us to consider that when we are full of ourselves, of our own resources, there can never be any meaningful room for God in our lives.

It is entirely probable that Jesus had a much keener understanding of the human psyche than what modern minds credit him. He certainly knows the stubborn, independent, "I can do it myself" me very well. As I read these "beatitudes", I understand Jesus to be saying that the people who are most blessed are those who lack resources to such a degree that they are forced to rely upon God. Those who have a myriad of resources invariably call on those resources instead of God, thereby making more trouble for themselves than they had before. Yes, God helps those who help themselves – BUT – the danger comes when we are so full of ourselves and own resources, our own knowledge and education and competence, that there is

no room in our lives, our joys or our sorrows, for God.

Perhaps a twenty-first century way of saying this might be, "Blessed are those who know they are not entirely self-reliant; they shall know the joy of relying on the strength and sufficiency of God to help them."

Self-reliance may seem to offer some sense of control in a turbulent, chaotic time – yet, does it?

Let me put today's theme in the form of a question, for you and for me: "In what do we put our trust?" As communities, as a congregation, and certainly as individuals - in what/whom do we put our trust?

Let's revisit our text in Luke for a few moments. There is nothing intrinsically virtuous about being poor or hungry. Jesus is not congratulating the poor for having attained poverty or promising them rewards for the accomplishment. Poverty, hunger, sorrow, ostracism ... these are not good things to be encouraged. They are bad things. But, Jesus was saying that those who suffer in these ways are blessed because (whether they know it or not) God cares for them and will put right that which is wrong.

Likewise, there is nothing intrinsically evil about laughing, or being rich, or full, or spoken well of – unless someone concludes that they deserve such things. The problem with riches, fullness, laughter, popularity is that they are a distraction from what matters. They can content the heart so much that it no longer yearns for intimacy with the Maker.

In a real way, our texts today are saying that there are only two ways of living life. There is life lived with trust in God, and there is life lived apart from that trust.

Friends, it makes all the difference in our lives which way we choose. Jeremiah used the metaphor of the tree and the shrub, a tumbleweed perhaps. Jesus used the words, "Blessed" and "Woe". The God who created us, who knows us through and through, sets before each of us a choice – to live in him, nourished by his everlasting life and strengthened in his vitality, or to live for ourselves, proud of our self-sufficiency and independence. Choose life. Be "like the tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green." [Jeremiah 17:8a,b]