

## The 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

**Jeremiah 20:10-13; Psalm 69; Romans 5:12-15; Matthew 10:26-33**

This morning we are back in “Ordinary time” in the church year. The last “Ordinary time” Sunday was February 23<sup>rd</sup>, before Lent and COVID-19. While it is called “Ordinary,” we are in an extra-ordinary time - an unprecedented time of global pandemic, national racial unrest, presidential election year, volatile markets, and virtually no tourism in Juneau. This is an extra-ordinary time.

Our Old Testament reading finds us in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was an extra-ordinary prophet who spoke a message predicting a terrible and great disaster for Israel: Jerusalem would be conquered, the Temple destroyed and God’s people would be taken into exile. As you can imagine, Jeremiah was not a popular prophet and his ministry was not easy.

We get a sense of Jeremiah’s difficulties from our first reading. “I hear the whisperings of many: ‘Terror on every side! Denounce! Let us denounce him!’ All those who were my friends are on the watch for any misstep of mine. ‘Perhaps he will be trapped; then we can prevail and take our vengeance on him.’”

Wow, it is not easy to be a prophet. It is not easy to be a Christian. For Jeremiah, sharing a message of destruction and surrender was not well received. Living a life and speaking a message that is counter to the prevailing culture or popular opinion made being a prophet especially challenging.

We are living in a time of immense secularity. More and more people do not believe in God, do not think God is necessary and/or that religion is relevant to their lives.

“The Chosen” is a new TV series on the life of Jesus. I highly recommend it. The image they use at the beginning of each episode is of a few fish swimming against the flow, against the current. This is the way of God’s people. We are called as Paul says in Romans 12, “Not to be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of our minds.” Or as Eugene Peterson puts it in his translation, “The Message”, “Do not be so well adjusted to your culture that you fit in without even thinking about it.”

In this life, the followers of Jesus will experience hardships and suffering. Yet, there is more than difficulties and suffering. There is more than struggle and fear. There is a deeper reality, a deeper truth. In the midst of the difficulty, in the midst of the confusion, fear, hardships and sadness, God is with us!

Jeremiah speaks of his hardships, how even his friends looked for a way to trap him. Bishop Barren states that Jeremiah's nick name was "Terror on either side". In the midst of his persecution, Jeremiah proclaimed, "**But, the Lord is with me, like a mighty champion.**"

"But" like the word "Yet", are conjunctions used to show contrasts. Jeremiah's witness reveals there is a vital "Yet" in our stories.

Jeremiah is a man of contrasts. Treated as he was he nevertheless trusted in God. Jeremiah is able to look beyond and through his present difficulties knowing that the Lord was with him like a mighty champion.

We have fears, we have sufferings, we have disappointments in our lives. Yet, God is with us!

If our lives are modeled after Jesus, we will experience suffering. Sharing the Good News of Jesus will at times cause hardships, misunderstandings and even rejection. Even if our nick name isn't "Terror on either side."

Fr. Richard Rohr maintains that God is the ultimate reality and since Jesus suffered, we too will suffer. Faithful discipleship leads to the cross. Jesus himself said, "Take up your cross daily."

Yet, amidst the difficulties and the fears of our lives, God is faithful! See again, how important that little word "Yet" is.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus is preparing to send out his disciples to proclaim the Good News. He knows that suffering will be part of their experience, but he does not want them to give up. He does not want fear to paralyze them. Thus, he encourages them not to fear, but to speak with assurance and to remember the sparrows.

Jesus said to the Twelve:

"Fear no one.

Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed,  
nor secret that will not be known.

What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light;  
what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.

And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul;  
rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy  
both soul and body in Gehenna.

Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? **Yet**, not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

Without the “Yet”, without the conjunction, without the contrast, we can get overwhelmed and lose sight or forget altogether the love and faithfulness of God.

Listen to these powerful “Yets” in God’s word:

**Lamentations 3:19-26:**

“The thought of my suffering and homelessness  
is bitter beyond words.

20 I will never forget this awful time,  
as I grieve over my loss.

21 **Yet** I still dare to hope  
when I remember this:

22 The faithful love of the Lord never ends!  
His mercies never cease.

23 Great is his faithfulness;  
his mercies begin afresh each morning.

**Habakkuk 3:17-19:**

“Though the fig tree does not bud  
and there are no grapes on the vines,  
though the olive crop fails  
and the fields produce no food,  
though there are no sheep in the pen  
and no cattle in the stalls,

18 **Yet** I will rejoice in the Lord,  
I will be joyful in God my Savior.

**Jeremiah 50:33-34:**

“This is what the Lord Almighty says:

“The people of Israel are oppressed,  
and the people of Judah as well.

All their captors hold them fast,  
refusing to let them go.

34 **Yet** their Redeemer is strong;  
the Lord Almighty is his name.

He will vigorously defend their cause  
so that he may bring rest to their land...”

**Job 13:15:**

“Though He slay me, **Yet** will I trust Him”.

In our passages this morning we see the same pattern. Jeremiah's "Yet" leads him to claim God as his mighty champion.

Jesus' "Yet" in Matthew highlights God's infinite knowledge and care for each of us. Not one sparrow falls to the ground without God's knowledge and we are worth far more than many sparrows.

In reflecting on our Gospel reading and the sparrows, John Chrysostom preached in the fourth century these powerful words: "What do you see in creation of less value than a tiny sparrow? But even the sparrow will not fall without God's knowledge. Jesus does not mean that the sparrow falls by God's direct will because it is unworthy but that nothing that occurs is hidden from God. If then God is not ignorant of anything that happens in creation, and if God loves us more truly than the best human father, and if God loves us so as to have numbered our very hairs, then we need not be afraid. Jesus said this not to indicate that God literally has a number placed on the very hairs of our head but rather to show that God has perfect knowledge of everything about us and providentially cares for everything about us. Therefore, if God both knows all things that happen to us and is able to save us and willing to do so, then whatever we may be suffering, we need not think that God has forsaken us in our suffering. For it is not God's will to keep us wholly separated from that which elicits dread but rather to persuade us not to make an idol out of whatever we dread. It is this, more than anything else, that constitutes deliverance from dread. "Therefore, don't be afraid. You are of more value than many sparrows." Don't you see that God views your fear with more concern than the lives of many sparrows? He already knows the secrets of your heart. Hence Jesus adds, "Do not fear." For even if that which you dread prevails, it prevails only over your body; this is the limited part of yourself."

I could sit with these words for hours.

"Yet" is a powerful word which leads to hope and encouragement! Without the "Yet" our difficulties and fears, "what we dread" as Chrysostom said, can become idols. Without the "Yet", we can lose sight of God's faithfulness and intimate care and compassion for us. Without the "Yet" we can become lost in confusion and overburdened by our fears and uncertainties.

I pray you have a "Yet" that leads you to the truth and comfort of God's love.

I wonder if we might be called to help point others to the "Yet" of God's mercy and love.

On this Father's Day, I am especially thankful for my dad and the ways he has led me to the "Yet" of God's love and truth.

My dad is a humble man who has served his family well. One day he told me a story I will never forget. He was sailing in an overnight sailboat race on Puget Sound, north of Seattle. It was in the middle of the night and he was alone in the cockpit of the sailboat. Suddenly there was a bright light that filled the cockpit where he was steering the boat. No other boats were around, but the light was as bright as the day. He looked where the light was shining brightest and there on the railing of the boat was a little sparrow. My dad said his heart was flooded with the truth that as God's eye is on the sparrow so too God's eye and heart is on my dad. Suddenly, the light was gone.

My Dad was given a gift from God that night that has helped shape his life and has been his "Yet" calling him back to the truth of God's love anytime circumstances, emotions and fears indicate otherwise.

When life is hard and difficulties arise, my dad knows in the depth of his being there is a "Holy Yet." Yet, God is faithful and has our back!

My dad's witness has helped shape my own "Yet". Our world, nation and our next door neighbors are in need of words of truth prompted by the "Yet" of God's love, mercy, compassion and presence. Though we live in this unprecedented and extra-ordinary time of pandemic and racial unrest may our lives and words speak of God's great YET: Yet, God is with us like a mighty champion. Yet, not one sparrow falls to the ground without God's knowledges. Do not fear, you are worth far more than then many sparrows.

I will pray for you and ask that you pray for me.

Happy Father's Day!

God bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Steve