

Sunday, June 21, 2020

Lectionary 12, Year A

Introduction

God does not promise that the path of the disciple will be easy. Jeremiah feels the pain of rejection from those who do not want to hear what he has to say. Jesus declares that his words may bring stark division. Even so, we need not be afraid for God accounts for each hair on our heads. Though we may experience rejection, frustration, division, and death, God's grace and love make us a new creation each day. Marked with the cross and filled with holy food, we are sent from worship to witness to Christ in the world.

Overview

God Comes First

God is, the theologians say, transcendent—beyond us, always exceeding our easy grasp. Recognizing God's awesome transcendence brings a reevaluation of other values. The God of vertigo-inspiring infinitude is also the God who knows the hairs of our head. Trusting this God, fear is defanged and faith becomes a sort of courage. We live in faithful relationship to the hair-counting God as we joyfully "acknowledge" the one who acknowledges us. And as we do so, reveling in the intimacy of God's loving regard for us, other relationships, even familial ones, take on a different cast. God comes first, we realize, not only in priority, but ontologically, "in the beginning." Before the God who is at once gracious and transcendent, we "lose" our lives and discover the true life in following the way of Jesus the crucified Son.

Prayer of the Day

Teach us, good Lord God, to serve you as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labor and not to ask for reward, except that of knowing that we do your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

First Reading: Jeremiah 20:7-13

Jeremiah accuses God of forcing him into a ministry that brings him only contempt and persecution. Yet Jeremiah is confident that God will be a strong protector against his enemies and commits his life into God's hands.

⁷O Lord, you have enticed me,
and I was enticed;

you have overpowered me,
and you have prevailed.

I have become a laughingstock all day long;
everyone mocks me.

⁸For whenever I speak, I must cry out,
I must shout, "Violence and destruction!"
For the word of the Lord has become for me
a reproach and derision all day long.

⁹If I say, "I will not mention him,
or speak any more in his name,"
then within me there is something like a burning fire
shut up in my bones;

I am weary with holding it in,
and I cannot.

¹⁰For I hear many whispering:
"Terror is all around!
Denounce him! Let us denounce him!"
All my close friends
are watching for me to stumble.

"Perhaps he can be enticed,
and we can prevail against him,

and take our revenge on him.”

¹¹But the Lord is with me like a dread warrior;
therefore my persecutors will stumble,
and they will not prevail.

They will be greatly shamed,
for they will not succeed.

Their eternal dishonor
will never be forgotten.

¹²O Lord of hosts, you test the righteous,
you see the heart and the mind;
let me see your retribution upon them,
for to you I have committed my cause.

¹³Sing to the Lord;
praise the Lord!

For he has delivered the life of the needy
from the hands of evildoers.

Psalm: Psalm 69:7-10 [11-15] 16-18

Answer me, O Lord, for your love is kind. (Ps. 69:16)

⁷Surely, for your sake I have suffered reproach,
and shame has covered my face.

⁸**I have become a stranger to my own kindred,
an alien to my mother's children.**

⁹Zeal for your house has eaten me up;
the scorn of those who scorn you has fallen upon me.

¹⁰**I humbled myself with fasting,
but that was turned to my reproach. R**

[¹¹I put on sackcloth also,
and became a byword among them.

¹²**Those who sit at the gate murmur against me,
and the drunkards make songs about me.**

¹³But as for me, this is my prayer to you, at the time you have set, O Lord:

"In your great mercy, O God, answer me with your unfailing help.

¹⁴**Save me from the mire; do not let me sink;
let me be rescued from those who hate me and out of the deep waters. R**

¹⁵Let not the torrent of waters wash over me, neither let the deep swallow me up;
do not let the pit shut its mouth upon me.

] ¹⁶**Answer me, O Lord, for your love is kind;
in your great compassion, turn to me.**

¹⁷Hide not your face from your servant;
be swift and answer me, for I am in distress.

¹⁸**Draw near to me and redeem me;
because of my enemies deliver me. R**

Second Reading: Romans 6:1b-11

In baptism we were incorporated into the reality of Christ's death and resurrection. We have been made new in Christ through his death and resurrection to live freed from sin.

^{1b}Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Gospel: Matthew 10:24-39

Jesus warns his disciples that their ministry in his name will meet with opposition. However, he assures them that they need not fear for the truth will come to light. Life is found in Christ.

[Jesus said to the twelve:] ²⁴“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

²⁶“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³²“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

³⁴“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

³⁶and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

Theological Reflection

Overzealous Christians who claim to be “cured” of their sinful nature often merit suspicion. Lutheran theology teaches that nothing we do can ever free us from sin’s power. Hypocritical televangelists in these and olden days serve as a reminder, exhorting followers from their own lavish mansions to tithe generously, and counseling marital fidelity while concealing their own affairs. Skeptics rightly point out that if Christian life didn’t purge the sinful nature of these loud-and-proud followers of Jesus, is such a claim even believable, let alone possible? Paul’s distinction is helpful here: being “dead to sin” is inseparable from being “alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11). Since our own sinful nature kills us daily, it’s only in Christ that we may be “dead to sin and alive to God.” Righteousness is never “ours” by anything except God’s work through Christ—and ironically, the more righteous we proclaim ourselves to be, the more likely we’re not.