

# St. Paul: On The Same page

06.29.14 for Pentecost 3a

## Day One: Jeremiah 28:5-9

*<sup>5</sup>Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to Hananiah the prophet...*

*"Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD make the words that you have prophesied come true, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the LORD, and all the exiles. <sup>7</sup>Yet hear now this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. <sup>8</sup>The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. <sup>9</sup>As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet."*

Someone said to me once, "I don't come to church to hear bad news." It sounds like the residents of Jerusalem felt the same way. "Tell us something happy."

Hananiah told the people great news. He announced that within two years God was going to "break the yoke" of the Babylonians, and he was going to bring back all of

those who had been taken prisoner and the wealth that they had lost.

Wonderful! It would be like predicting a cure for cancer, the defeat of terrorism, and a winning lottery ticket all in one sermon! There's just one problem... it wasn't true. It wasn't from God.

We would like to hear happy news today. We'd love to hear that God is going to give us good stuff because he loves us. We'd like to hear that God approves of all our choices and he wants us to be happy. But what happens to children whose parents raise them that way?

God is a loving Father, so he will do what is best for us. But he doesn't always have happy things to tell us – at least not happy in the sense that we want. He won't tell us that we can have our own way. But he does tell us, just as Jeremiah the faithful prophet said, that he has a way for us... and it's a good way.

**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, sometimes I am weary of all the bad news, but I do not want false hopes. Instead, fill my heart with the real hope, the life you have promised me in Jesus. Amen.*

## Day Two

### Second Reading: Romans

#### 7:1-13

<sup>4</sup>*Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God...*

<sup>6</sup>*But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.*

I used to dream of what it would be like to float in zero gravity. If the law of gravity did not apply to me, how different my life would be! Of course, without gravity there would be a new set of problems. Everything we do would have to be done in a new way.

Paul says you have been released from the law of sin and death. Like zero gravity, you no longer have the Law weighing you down, crushing you with guilt. Is your life different as a result?

Knowing that you are no longer guilty – that you will no longer die forever – that you are clean before God... how should your life be changed?

Paul does not say that you are now free to sin. Instead, what he means is that you are no longer controlled by the Law, but by the Gospel. Your decisions should no longer be controlled by guilt, but by joy.

What is the difference? If God still desires you to love him with all your heart and soul, and to love your neighbor as yourself, then aren't you still under Law?

Think of it this way. Have you ever seen children joyfully doing chores? I have. I've seen a child being miserable, wailing, screaming, and acting as if the world would end because of a tiny task, like picking up a toy. And I've seen that same child singing and even dancing to do much harder things, purely out of joy and love. Which way of life is better?

Paul says we can live in joy, and follow Jesus out of gratitude, because we are set free from the groaning guilt of the Law. Does your life look like this?

**Prayer:** *Dearest Lord Jesus, let me live free today. Unafraid. Unburdened. Filled with love, because I am loved. Sharing my life because I have unending life. Amen.*

### **Day Three: Matt. 10:34-42**

*"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup>For 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. <sup>36</sup>And a person's enemies will be those of his own household... <sup>38</sup>And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup>Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

In our Old Testament lesson, Jeremiah came with bad news. He was called to tell the people of Israel that they were not going to win their war with Babylon. But he told them that in the end, after 70 years in exile, God would rescue them.

In the gospel lesson, Jesus also comes with bad news. Or does he? Jesus says that turning to him and trusting in him will mean turning away from all other things. It may even bring conflict or, as Jesus says, a sword.

But what can we know about our future if we believe in Jesus? We know that if we follow him, we will live in him, and we will have the life that

he has won for us. "Whoever finds his life will lose it..." That is, whoever is searching and searching for good things on earth will lose his life in the end.

"Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." That is, whoever finds life in Jesus will have life that is forever.

Jesus spoke several versions of this strange contradiction. But perhaps it is not so strange after all. We know that other things work this way. You cannot get stronger by resting more and more each day. You cannot build a strong marriage by looking for someone who will love you (without you having to give yourself to them).

Jeremiah preached bad news, but it was really good news because God had the gift of life for his people. Now Jesus has good news for you. Maybe trusting in Jesus means losing some earthly things, but it means gaining eternal things.

**Prayer:** *Dear Jesus, I cannot do it. I cannot surrender all I love. Work in me to replace those earthly things and earthly desires with your heavenly gifts. Amen.*

## Day Four: Matthew 10:34-42

<sup>40</sup> *"Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. <sup>41</sup> The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. <sup>42</sup> And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."*

My father-in-law remembered what it was like to attend pastoral conferences in the 1940s (in Western Canada). The pastors would travel from far away to meet at one church, and they did not stay in nice hotels or eat meals in a conference center. They were put up each night in the homes of local members, people they didn't know. And they were fed by the ladies of the church.

These days we would feel uncomfortable with that. Many people would be reluctant to have a pastor stay in their home. (Secret: Some people are afraid of pastors!) And many pastors would prefer more privacy than staying in the home of a

stranger. But perhaps we are missing something. How can we "receive" someone who has been sent by Jesus?

Jesus is not just talking about support for missionaries or pastors. Our Lord says that even a "little one" may be one of his disciples that we should welcome. And we welcome them, perhaps not as guests in our home, but whenever we listen to them – learn from them – and care for them. As we care for others, our fellow believers, we receive and care for Jesus.

Think of this when you walk into church next Sunday. Who is sitting there? Who do you receive, welcome, greet, and encourage? A cup of cold water brings refreshment. So does a listening ear or a word of encouragement.

Can anyone say that you refreshed them? Like throwing the tiny switch that starts a large machine, Jesus gives us the chance to do small things that make a large difference!

**Prayer:** *Dear Jesus, I have a cup of water. Show me how to refresh your servants. Amen.*