

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, July 2, 2017. Dungeness Valley Lutheran Church, Sequim, WA.
Jeremiah 28:5-9; Psalm 89; Romans 6:12-23; Matthew 10:40-42

Jeremiah 28:5-9

5 Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord; ⁶and the prophet Jeremiah said, ‘Amen! May the Lord do so; may the Lord fulfil the words that you have prophesied, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the Lord, and all the exiles. ⁷But listen now to this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. ⁸The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. ⁹As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet.’

Matthew 10:40-42

40 ‘Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴²and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.’

They warned us in seminary never to get into a spat with the choir director.

During his first Sunday, the new pastor preached on how we should dedicate ourselves to service. The director then led the choir in singing, 'We Shall Not Be Moved.'

The next Sunday, the pastor preached on how we should gladly give to the work of the Lord. The choir director then led the song, 'Jesus Paid It All.'

The next Sunday, the pastor preached on gossiping and how we should watch our tongues. The hymn was 'I Love To Tell The Story.'

When the preacher resigned the next week, he told the church that Jesus had led him there and Jesus was taking him away. The choir then sang, 'What A Friend We Have in Jesus.' ☺

Grace, mercy and peace to you from our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“I never realized how much I would miss Pastor Jack.”

“I didn’t expect to be so moved at his last service.”

“Will we find a pastor who can accommodate the worship needs of our traditional as well as our progressive members?”

Take a deep breath. Transitions are always, always challenging.

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In the first reading, some 6 centuries or so before Jesus' time, Jeremiah and Hananiah and the people who came to the temple were wringing their hands. They missed the citizens and leaders taken into exile in Babylon. And they wanted their stolen golden religious vessels returned.

Sad to say, the armies of Babylon later destroyed the city and the temple and took many more people into exile. Years would pass, but political powers would change and some people eventually returned to Jerusalem and brought their temple treasures and golden vessels back with them. God was in the process.

Now, 8 centuries later, perhaps our "golden vessels" are marked by questions. Will our church grow, will we attract young families and children? Will our liturgy be changed around by someone who doesn't like the way we are used to doing things? Is there a pastor who will accept our call? Love us? Be gentle with us? Visit us in the hospital?

When the people of Israel were taken to Babylon, some of them wondered if God would follow them and be their God there. Over and over the prophets and priests assured them, "Yes!" Many things change, but the important things stay the same.

I assure you that God remains with this church and with the process that you will pursue for your future. Ask for God's presence at every change and chance! Know that Jesus promised he would be with us always – even to the end of the world.

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One of the old pastors I knew in south Jersey years ago is said to have stood before his congregation and said, "You are all going to heaven. Of that you can be certain. What we need to talk about today is HOW you will live your life in the meantime."

Jesus promised his disciples that their reward was secure. Now, how were they going to live in the meantime?

Jesus talks of welcoming, of being received. In his day, the law stated that if an important person sent a messenger, the messenger was to be treated with the same respect as one would treat the person who sent him. Just like if you're meeting the friend of a friend for the first time. You treat the new person as a friend.

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Matthew remembers Jesus talking of welcoming prophets, righteous people, and little ones.

The PROPHETS were the preachers and teachers of that time. Often they traveled from place to place, housed and fed by those who listened to their words. For a while my own German grandfather, like other circuit-riding preachers of the early American church, although not an

ordained pastor, is said to have gone around New England and the Midwest on horseback carrying the Gospel from place to place and living in the homes of fellow-believers. People welcomed him because of the person – Jesus – whom he represented.

You have welcomed me in the same manner: because your bishop recommended me as a representative of his office and a representative of Jesus, whom we all serve.

The second group, RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE, were probably traveling Christian leaders. They too were to be received, much as you would welcome a fellow church member to your home or to your hospital room – as a representative of the congregation, a brother or sister in faith.

The third group was called “LITTLE ONES.” These were believers, young and old – and Jesus may have gestured at his own group of vulnerable disciples when he said this. They were people who may have been under pressure from their families to leave Jesus. Humble people, easily ignored in any group, often remain on the edges of a fellowship. Perhaps they are WE ourselves – so easily drawn away from the community of faith by either an important non-Christian in our lives or by an insensitive fellow-believer, or by our own carelessness.

“Welcome these people,” says Jesus. “Do not neglect them! Honor them. They are important in God’s eyes. Give them a cold drink.” When you welcome them, you are welcoming Jesus.

Now, sometimes our throats are dry and we also thirst. Mark remembers Jesus’ words this way, “Whoever gives YOU a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ, will by no means lose his reward.” Thus, we are among the “little ones” to benefit from cool refreshing water for our thirsty lives.

What would a cup of cold water be for us? We might think of the gift of Baptism, the cool water that brings us into the fellowship of faith. Is cold water the refreshing joy of being together each week to worship, sing, pray, gather for Communion? Is it the comfort of hearing that each morning offers us a new start? Is it the reminder that we are important to both God and to one another? Is it the word of friendship or concern that we may receive over coffee or at Bible study or in our crafting circles or men’s breakfast or garage sale preparations or committee meetings?

Flora Wuellner, a contemporary poet, thinks of Jesus’ cool refreshing water this way:

The risen, living Christ calls me by name;

Comes to the loneliness within me; heals that which is wounded in me;

Comforts that which grieves me; seeks for that which is lost within me;

Releases me from that which has dominion over me;

Cleanses me of that which does not belong to me;

Renews that which feels drained within me;

Awakens that which is asleep in me; names that which is formless within me;

Empowers that which is newborn within me;

Consecrates and guides that which is strong within me;

Restores me to this world which needs me;

Reaches out in endless love to others through me.

Now THAT'S a cup of cool water – and then some!

Once we have received this refreshing – yes, life giving – water, we can easily welcome the prophet, the righteous person, and the other little ones who need a cup of cool water. We can give freely because we have freely received.

We have hundreds of opportunities to give cups of cold water. Showing someone how to solve a computer problem without putting them down. Figuring out the fairest and most efficient way to handle a problem. Showing by your honesty who it is that you serve. Cleaning up after someone else – a child, a patient, a co-worker, a spouse. Balancing the numbers, talking to phone contacts, caring for your families – welcoming all people-- in the name of Jesus, in the name of a disciple. Cold water abounds.

Looking beyond our own walls, we learn that in Clallum County, the basic annual survival budget for a family with two small children needing childcare is \$54, 468. That doesn't allow for cell phone, savings, or emergencies. The median household income in this county is \$47,253, over \$7,000 below the basic survival budget. And the poverty rate in Clallum County is 15% -- that's about 1 in 7 households.

We can see the vital importance of the good work being done for and by the Food Bank, the planning and hopes for a transitional shelter for families and individuals experiencing homelessness, and the other generous projects this congregation supports to extend God's welcome beyond the church.

We live thankfully and faithfully during our time of transition. We plan optimistically to serve our neighbors as well as for this congregation's future, knowing that God is in the process.

I received an email from Pastor Jack this week where he said he missed us all and sends his blessings. God is in the process.

Giving as we have received is our way of life. **Drink deeply, pour freely of Jesus' living water.** Our reward is secure. Thanks be to God. Amen.

No laughs, we chose "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" long before this sermon was written. Let's rise and sing.