

June 28th 2020

Jeremiah 28; 5-9

⁵Then 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 fulfill 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."

Romans 6;12-end

¹²Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³No longer present your members to sin as instruments^[a] of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments^[b] of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. ¹⁵What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have

become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, ¹⁸and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations.^[c] For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

²⁰When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. ²²But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Matthew 10; 40 – end

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."

Hold your position for the long haul

Monty Python's Life of Brian is a satirical fiction but I found myself wondering if the temple courtyard in about 600 BC bore any resemblance to a chaotic scene with several prophets all declaiming "Thus says the Lord" -

The Christian story is full of ripping yarns. But making the first part of our bible my specialist subject on Mastermind would end in ignominy. I can hear John Humphries now – you scored three and passed on 15. Jeremiah is 800 pages in and I have never really got that far. Our reading today was for me devoid of context and I had to explore. If the story is familiar to you I hope you won't mind revisiting it. I hope that we can all enjoy sharing it and that together we can capture something of the kind of person Jeremiah was. His story is a huge tapestry full of colourful detail.

Jeremiah lived in difficult times for Judah. Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had besieged Jerusalem. The city had surrendered and the royal family, the government officials and leading men had been taken

into exile together with the sacred gold artefacts from the Solomon's temple.

We know that in difficult times more and more people pop up to tell everyone else what to do. False prophets populate the biblical narrative from the time of the prophets of Baal and Elijah on Mount Carmel to the days of Micah, when priests and prophets tailored their words to the size of their salaries.

So back to speakers corner at the Jerusalem temple. Picture Jeremiah as one among many prophets standing in the temple courtyard. He was in competition with them, surrounded by an audience able to come and go as they pleased and free to heckle. **We** might see the prophets as the pundits and commentators of the day. Just as today, they would speak of their honestly held beliefs. They had their own clear insight which felt God-given and was to be shared with the people. **Thus says the Lord**. The problem was that the Lord seemed to be telling them conflicting messages. Plus ça change. Nothing changes

Earlier in the account we read that Jeremiah warned the people that if they did not return to the Lord the temple and the city would be destroyed. That message was so unacceptable to everyone that they wanted him sentenced to death. Jeremiah's response? He repeated the same message and placed himself in their hands telling them to do with him what they thought was right, adding that if they killed him they would all be responsible. Reason prevailed and Jeremiah survived.

After all that background we **are** getting nearer to today's reading.

In the chapter before we read that Jeremiah hears God telling him to make a yoke of straps and bars and to wear it on his neck. He is to prophesy that Judah and all the surrounding kingdoms will become subservient to the king of Babylon and that the best way forward is to **let** that happen. Any peoples that **don't** serve Babylon willingly will be subject to war plague and famine.- And another thing -Any prophets that say anything different are wrong.

And so at last the immediate context of our reading for today. In this scene Jeremiah -still with his yoke on his neck - (handy for social distancing) is in conversation with Hananiah who has just prophesied - God says I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon - and all the things he took from the temple will be back inside two years.

Our reading is Jeremiah's response. Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD fulfill the words that you have prophesied, But 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. As 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.

Jeremiah courteously holds to his position, knowing that Judah could choose to be peaceful and that quick fixes are not always the best. But immediately following our reading Jeremiah allows Hananiah to remove the yoke and he goes off on his own for a bit. Jeremiah has another insight – yes the wooden yoke has been broken but it is

going to be replaced with an iron yoke to **make** the people serve the king of Babylon.

Jeremiah kept trying. He wrote to the exiles in Babylon telling them to settle down there, build houses, plant fields, marry and enlarge their families. This is going to be a long job., 70 years. There was more opposition - over 20 more chapters. Jeremiah held his position- return to the Lord – but the people did not listen. And in the end Nebuchadnezzar **did** destroy Jerusalem including the **temple** and took the rest of the people into exile.

Jeremiah courteously held his position with confidence and integrity. He kept telling the people in spite of dreadful opposition that they could choose peace and avoid war, plague and famine. How welcome would he be in today's public discourse?

In some ways Paul is like Jeremiah. He continues to hold his position with confidence and integrity – though he is perhaps a little less courteous. In Christ Jesus you are given everything – so take a long term view - choose the road that leads to life, life in all its fullness, - or as one of

today's collects describes it in words from later in Romans - the glorious liberty of the children of God.

This is our third week in Matthew chapter 10 where Jesus lays his yoke on the disciples. He tells the disciples what to do and what to expect – last week it sounded pretty tough – but today we hear the flip side - those who welcome you welcome me - and the one who sent me. There is hope.

Like Jeremiah, the disciples, St Paul our yoke is to proclaim confidently and courteously God's kingdom of love, justice, mercy and peace. Quick fixes may not be the right answer. We pray for a right judgement in all things. Like Jeremiah we are in it for the long term.