

Sunday Thought

11th September 2022 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22 - 28
Psalm 14
1 Timothy 1: 12 -17
Luke 15: 1 - 10



But God!

It is difficult to enter into the lives of the millions of people engulfed in the tragedy of devastating floods in Pakistan. We give, we pray and we feel so helpless. Floods are one thing Jeremiah does not mention in his visionary list of terrible happenings. He understood them to be the Lord's judgement on his wayward people. We may explain them, in part still today as the consequences of sinful living by so much of humanity. The list of terrible images is not dissimilar to some alarming news bulletins of recent days, or memories of recurrent themes of many horror movies.

Once again, Jeremiah the artist thinks in pictures to explain his vision of impending doom. He would see children playing in the city streets and wrote, *'God sees his people behaving like foolish children who have brought these things on themselves.'* That could be a contemporary comment on the ideals and practices of many leading figures of our society. The most significant word accompanying the landscape painted by Jeremiah is *'But' – But God! The Lord has told us the simple remedy for the whole nation's salvation. If, as God says, the fundamental problem is, 'My people do not really know me.' Then the remedy is to 'know God', to love and obey him.* We are privileged to hear this from our side of AD1 -the Jesus side of history, after God came among us, as one of us, with a practical invitation to know him. I love the words of John in his first letter [1 John 1] when he tells how God, the Word of Life from before the beginning of everything, has made himself known to us, *'We have seen him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands!'* So, Jeremiah, centuries earlier was sharing the same Gospel hope when he said, *'The problem is that you don't know God. BUT God knows you and wants you to know him in all his grace and truth!!'*

'BUT GOD' is a theme which runs through today's selected scriptures. Psalm 14 echoes Jeremiah's words as the poet claims, *'It is childish fools who think they are so wise that they proudly proclaim 'there is no God. So why keep the commandments? After all, no one is perfect when it comes to doing what is right. Why pray to God who doesn't exist?'* The psalmist answers with God's own reply to them, *'These people do not know me, BUT they will be terrified when they see how I protect those who obey me and live in a humble relationship with me.'*

Writing to Timothy, Paul uses his personal testimony – he loved to tell the story – of how he, *the worst of sinners*, persecuted the first churches, beginning with the murder of deacon Stephen. Then comes another 'BUT GOD!' *Thankfully, Jesus met me on the road, not far from Damascus [Acts 9]. Even though I spoke and worked against him, he gave me strength to serve him. He appointed me as worthy to be his apostle to the Gentiles. He was so faithful and loving.* Paul came to know God in a new and personal way through meeting, trusting and growing ever closer to Jesus. Many of us may share Paul's experience, *'I was acting without knowledge of him and without faith in him - BUT GOD! But God changed all that!'*



This same theme is at the heart of Jesus' words in his first two *Lost Parables*. The lost Sheep is probably the better known of the two. I like to think Jesus told *The Lost Coin* story with characteristic humour. A woman panics over a lost personal treasure. She turns the whole house up-side-down searching for it. If the coin was, as often presumed, one of ten in a wedding headband, her husband may well have contributed to the panic! The point of Jesus' stories, as Luke explains, is addressed to the righteous religious leaders who objected to him as a Rabbi associating with commoners and sinners – *Roman sympathisers and loose women for example*. The stories made clear that for him, for God, these were priority people to be invited to share his 'Kingdom Life' *'You may want everyone to conform to your theology and religious practices, BUT GOD's greatest joy is to know them and for them to know and live for him, whoever they are.*

Hearing Jeremiah's prophecy of disastrous news bulletins and thinking of our own day to day life problems and challenges, I believe this is another good motto for Christian living – BUT GOD! For we who believe, whatever happens God is in it, working out his purposes. The heart of the 'good news' is the joy of God when we each have a personal relationship with him in Jesus.

A prayer in Disastrous Times [based on Psalm 14]

Lord, my God, I must never forget all the good and wonderful things happening in your world which bring you joy.
but we are also facing hard times.

Changing weather patterns of storm, flood, drought, and fire
evolve into greater poverty, starvation, and homelessness.

Political wrangling grows between nations, between rich and poor, masters and employees
with increased risks of conflict, war, and nuclear calamity

I long for your Kingdom to come all over the world.

I am challenged to cry 'BUT GOD' as a word of hope and faith,
confident that the world is still yours – the object of your love -
and that the light of Jesus will break into every darkest event.

