

Sunday Thought

13th February 2022 Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

Jeremiah 17: 5 - 10

Psalm 1

1 Corinthians 15: 11 - 20

Luke 6: 17 - 26

Great Reversal

For a few years my school days began and ended with a steam railway journey. I suppose that could be an exciting prospect for young lads today, but for us it was not the most urgent ambition on a cold, wet winter morning.

That was not helped when for months the train passed a siding in which stood three old carriages. On the side of them in very large letters was painted the word 'Condemned'! There were some school mornings when I felt empathy with those old coaches. Now I think of how they had shared so much of human life – carrying countless people to their work in the city, families to the seaside, travellers to the docks, troops to war Later, in my ministry, I enjoyed visiting an elderly couple who had spent their entire married life, and brought up their family, in a beautiful, converted railway carriage. It stood in a colourful, fruitful garden with many beehives from which they produced and sold honeyed items. I never wanted for a sore throat remedy and my shoes and car had a great beeswax shine. I hope the schoolday carriages had a similar after-life because they would illustrate the transformation Jesus brings to our life – from condemnation to glory! Sad, weary, and broken lives changed, forgiven, rolling into the future with love and sure hope of more glorious service ahead.



Today, our readings from the prophet Jeremiah and from psalm 1 have a similar picture of contrast and changed life. Life without faith in God, says Jeremiah, is like a shrub struggling to exist in a windswept, salty desert – or he may have written, the carriage with 'condemned' written across it. In contrast, to live trusting God who knows all our thoughts and the intricate desires of our hearts, is like a tree planted close to a river of fresh flowing water. The tree will still have its summer and winter seasons, it's years of plentiful or sparse fruiting, but it stays green. There is never a fruitless year. That is the way of life Jesus desires for us all – life in the Kingdom of God.

In the gospel reading Jesus had chosen his twelve apostles whom he would prepare to represent him in sharing the good news of this kingdom life. Now he is drawing great crowds by teaching old truths in new ways and by his healing works. His words were attractive to all levels of society. He talked of justice, equality, compassion, about the poor finding real riches of mind and spirit and the rich learning real spiritual poverty as the wealth of heaven becomes more appealing than material profit and acquisition. There is much more to think about from Jesus' words here. The Kingdom life is so different from much of our worldly living – as different as a windswept dried-up desert shrub and a fruitful, evergreen tree, its branches wind-dancing above a flowing river. It is a transformation – no longer condemned!

That sounds wonderful – and it is, but how am I to share that 'happy life'? The answer? *'It is a gift from God. Believe it. Accept it. Live it. Enjoy it.'* Elsewhere (Romans 8.1) Paul uses the same thought of condemnation and transformation when he says, *'there is NO condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus.'* Oh, the happiness of Kingdom Life! It's life spent with the greatest friend of all!

And 'how can I be sure?' Again, in today's reading Paul has the answer. *'The Kingdom Life comes with a guarantee! That's Jesus.* If I am asked to tell the story of Jesus, I do not start with readings from the Old Testament prophets or with his birth in Bethlehem. Like the first Christians I begin with the Resurrection. Jesus is not a storybook character. He is Christ, God's Son who shares our life, assuring us of the Father's gracious forgiveness. He brings the life of heaven into our everyday with the promise of that life being forever – the assurance we shall share resurrection with him. Paul reminds us how, for him, his old, condemned body became a home for Christ – *'Jesus met me on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus. He is alive with me and I with him, for ever!'*

A Prayer of Thanks (with Psalm 1 in mind)

Lord Jesus I long to be like a tree
planted beside the flowing stream of your grace,
constantly alive with your life,
happy when I am empty and when I have enough,
happier when I can share my enough with others.
Happy when life is good for me,
happier when I can help make life good for others.
Happy when friends do not share my experience of Kingdom Life,
happier when I can share that Life with them,
Happiest of all when your living presence is close with me.

