

Rev. Seth D. Bode †† Sermon 463, 02-13-2022 †† Epiphany 6

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

Jeremiah 17

7“Blessed is the strong man who trusts in the LORD, and whose trust is the LORD.”



Are you this tree of trust?

A Holocaust survivor once wrote that the most resilient in the death camps were not the strongest, the fittest, the outwardly best, or even those with the most food. The most resilient in the death camps were those with a spiritual life.

That’s what I would like to be, very nearly like a tree. I would like to be a great oak deeply rooted—a giant willow, when the weather of life whirls around me. But spiritually speaking, this doesn’t mean outward impressiveness. This means trust.

Do you seek resilience? Do you wish to have the trust Jeremiah describes?

ARE YOU THIS TREE OF TRUST?

I. Curse falls on denying the gospel

Jeremiah gives us something to aspire to. Now, this prophet should have seen a promising ministry. The southern kingdom of Judah saw its bitter days, but now things seemed to align for the nation. A young King Josiah was bringing spiritual revival. He tore down idols, chased out the deceivers, retold the Bible, and rededicated the people. Outwardly speaking, it seemed like things were gonna

be good.

Then the kingdom turned upside down. Josiah died young, Babylon came in and attacked, and the strongest and smartest Hebrews were carried off. The city fell, and God's temple burned. It was almost like the God of Jerusalem lost and died, if it weren't for the fact that He had foretold all of this. Jeremiah was a prophet who saw the catastrophe, and what started strong ended up becoming a miserable, persecuted ministry. Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet and took plenty of hits simply due to sharing God's Word.

Maybe we haven't seen the destruction of everything around us, but we've seen our share of catastrophes. Just think of the news cycle. Just think of our propensity to blame and guilt trip others and ourselves. Just think of the accelerated mental health crisis. How can we be okay?

Jeremiah answers with "*what the Lord says.*" There's something visually misguided in the world. Outwardly, what seems blessed is, in God's eyes, actually inwardly blessed. And outwardly, what looks cursed is actually quite blessed.

Outwardly, those who look strong have placed trust in men and artificial powers. That only gets you as far as men can plan, theorize, and execute. We may see success outwardly, for a time. But inwardly, such trust wastes away. You want to be like a desert bush drying away, go ahead and put your faith in humanity. It sounds so right, but it fails every time.

It gets so bad that when God offers men blessings, they refuse "*to see good things when they come.*" The cursed person here is the one who doesn't even see the love and peace God offers. It's the unbeliever who cannot stand God's good news. It is so close to the gospel of Jesus Christ, but so far.

This person is what Jeremiah calls the bush in the desert. It can't handle the sordid reality of life. It will not stand resilient in desperate times. The bush in the desert is left to face more than just heat. The curse here is truly the fire and darkness of hell, an eternity of abandonment and departure from the Lord.

That may seem like someone else, but just think: What could tear you away from God's promises? What could distract you more? What could move you? What would unsettle your focus on God's Word and sacraments? A diagnosis? A

broken limb? A broken heart? A death? A birth? A pastime? A TV show? A love interest? A big game? What would blur your heart's desire so much that you would forget to set it on things above, things that matter? Does your trust waver? Are you this tree yet?

Then we are reminded that false gods and idols are no strangers to our hearts. We were once trapped in them, and the human heart is deceitful beyond cure. We were born in darkness with hearts of sin. Each of us deserves the curse. We might ask why there must be any curse at all! But we refused to see blessings from the beginning. When our first parents ate of the one tree (you had one job!), they ate of the one tree they should not. So we too have hearts that are not so right. Where can we go for help?

II. *Blessing rests on those who trust the Lord*

Jeremiah should have been shaken and stirred and mixed-up and an emotional wreck. He was not perfect; Jeremiah spoke his fair share of harsh words. Yet Jeremiah carried out his ministry faithfully. For his heart was right, and Jeremiah knew what it was to trust.

This blessing is just beautiful, "*blessed is anyone who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him.*" Literally the words say, "*Blessed is the strong man who trusts in the LORD, and whose trust is the LORD.*" That's faith. Faith involves knowing God and His promises, and assenting to God's will. But the heart of faith rests confidently in the Lord.

For you know the Lord and the good things He has done. You poor sinners know His heart was in the right place. You rest your full confidence and trust in His merciful benefits, because as you know He became a curse for you. Like the bush in the desert, He took the heat of abandonment and forsakenness of hell.

And you will notice that the trust is not in self, for that would be trust in man. The trust is not in personal ability or strength to trust enough. The answer to our question of being a trusting tree is not to trust more. The answer is in Him, not in us. The answer is Jesus Christ. Only He trusted perfectly. He is our tree who never wavered in trusting His Father, and He could take the punishment of that desert bush heat in our place. Greater love has no one than this, and a greater heart has no one than the Lord Jesus Christ, that He lay down His life for you.

If you have gone through struggles and found that you are not as resilient as you wish, if outward consequences of life shake you, if you have not been this tree of trust—then you are not being asked to try harder today. You are being asked to look to the cross and to the Son of God who had perfect trust.

Then you will be this tree of trust. You will be blessed, that is, in a good place. No matter what storms you must weather, you will be strengthened by living water that quenches thirst. Just look at this tree! The picture is a peaceful one, with still waters and a gentle calm. This tree of trust sends out roots like a willow to drink deeply of overflowing reservoirs. It delights in Word and sacrament, and its leafy branches just get leafier. They bend with heavy fruits, like faith alone in Christ that is never alone, but always producing and always loving neighbors and those in need. Never does it cease to be fertile, flourishing, and luxuriantly alive.

Go now, brothers and sisters. Weather the rough times as well as the good. Consider others and their hearts, but never entrust yourselves to anyone but the Lord. He knew just how to trust in your place, and He knows just how to place you in deeper trust. He offers His Word and sacrament. Plant yourselves firmly on His promises and waver not, but grow inwardly, so the outward trials and hardships may pass and heaven may come. Amen.