

It's on our minds so I want to begin by saying a few words about our dear friend, Bill Warren who died on Friday. He fought a long battle with cancer, and in the end he has triumphed because he has risen to new life. Bill went to God happily surrounded by his favorite music and those whom he loved. We will never know the answer as to why sometimes the best people die young or young at heart. It seems terribly unfair. But as we all know cancer is a disease that does not have any sense of morality. What we can be sure of is that we are loved on this side of life, and on the next.

Some of us had been looking forward to rescheduling a book study group with Bill on one of his favorite subjects, St. Paul. I am imagining that now Bill can find out what Paul really meant in those letters. He doesn't have to read books about Paul anymore. I imagine and hope that Bill and Paul can have a nice discussion about all those tricky passages in Paul's letters.

As soon as I know when the service will be at St. Thomas' in NYC, you will know via parish email. I hope to arrange a small bus if possible, or at the very least, carools to take as many down for the service as would like to go.

"Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you, for in **its** welfare, you will find **your** welfare." (Jer 29:7) That is the last line of our reading from Jeremiah this morning. Be where your feet are. Enter into the life of the community in which you find yourself now. Build a house. Plant a garden. Have a family. Look around you and see where you are...and then be there.

Jeremiah lived in an important time in the history of Israel. It was a time of great transition and turmoil. He witnessed the fall of the Assyrian Empire as it was conquered by a new superpower of the seventh century BCE, the Babylonians under their powerful leader,

Nebuchadnezzar. We know more about the prophet Jeremiah than nearly any other Old Testament character. This is so because there is a great deal of biographical detail in his book and because it is backed up by outside historical sources. We learn in Jeremiah about kings and church leaders, about attitudes towards the Temple and about the horrors of war and defeat and exile.

Jeremiah's book follows the common pattern for a prophet's book; the first part is taken up with oracles, or prophecies of judgment. Then after God's punishment takes place (for that is how defeat in battle was seen in those days) then the prophet turns to give the people God's comforting and sustaining words. We've heard from Jeremiah for a number of weeks now. We started with those prophecies of doom and gloom. And now, as we reach the end of the book, we hear comfortable and encouraging words. Next week will be our last to hear from Jeremiah for quite some time.

And even if we now know that natural disasters, war, or death from dread disease, are not punishments from God: Now that we know that these are consequences of natural phenomena or the sinfulness of humans, that does not mean that we don't need Jeremiah. We still need to hear words of judgment when we behave badly and ought to rethink our actions. We still need to hear comfort and encouragement in times of trouble and grief.

We are now in stewardship season. Lynn will be telling us in a few minutes why Trinity Church is important to her. Your stewardship letters are out in the parish hall. We hope that you will pick yours up after church so that we can save some money on postage. This is your community and my community of faith. Even if you think that you are only here for a while, just passing through. If you have said to yourself, "This isn't really my church" "I'm not really a member here" I invite you to consider what God says to all of us through Jeremiah. Here is where you are. Grow where you are planted. Don't wait to find a better church, or a smarter, more caring priest. Don't wait to begin life some time down the road. Here and now is what

we have and what has been put in front of us. God has given us each other so that we can make a difference in each other's lives; so we can be Christ to each other through this community.

Now, as if Jeremiah's command isn't enough, Paul has another one for us in the passage from Second Timothy: Remember Jesus Christ. How do we remember Jesus Christ? We remember him as a man who did good deeds such as in today's Gospel reading of the healing of the lepers. We remember him in the Eucharist as we repeat the events of the Last Supper. What Paul is getting at though is deeper than that. Can we not just remember him, but can we **be** him? That's a tall order. Some may even cry, "Heresy!" But Paul also says that the Word of God is not chained. We cannot tie it down and make it do what we want it to do or say. We cannot enshrine God's words, or Jesus' words or the prophet's words in a box, untouchable forever. Jesus lives. And if that is true Jesus lives in us. What we must do is see Christ and recognize Christ like behavior in those around us.

There is a line in this Second Timothy passage that can be a stumbling block. It has troubled me in the past so I want to particularly address it. The phrase in question is in the hymn section (That's what scholars believe about that short section of "if" statements – that it is an ancient hymn). The troubling phrase is, "if we deny him he will also deny us." It's interesting that right in the passage that says that we cannot chain the Word of God appears a line that is often taken out of context, misquoted and held hostage to some who would read it too literally. Too bad Bill Warren isn't here this morning with his Greek New Testament. I would like to discuss the original Greek for this phrase. Our English words aren't able to translate the Greek in the way it was intended.

Professor Dirk Lange of Luther Seminary translates the hymn beautifully, "Jesus is the one who brings life from our deaths, who sustains us even as we struggle to be faithful ... who respects

us and our work, our context, so deeply that if we deny him, he will not insist on making his presence felt, like a burden, an imposition, law. Violence is not his way. And if, in our faith, we falter, Jesus Christ remains this historical presence through all time for us.”ⁱ If we do not know Christ, or see Christ, that’s OK for now. He is there waiting for our eyes to be opened. Jesus is always where our feet are.

We must address the lepers and their healing in Luke’s Gospel. I don’t have to work very hard to see what the common thread is that holds all these passages, and indeed all of Holy Scripture, together. It is **seeing** the bigger picture – **seeing** the connections between people and God. It is **seeing** more, with the help of God’s eyes.

Luke uses the character of a man of Samaria, a foreigner, and an outsider, to show us that we who are good, religious people sometimes don’t know how to **see** clearly. Sometimes it takes a Samaritan to show us how. First **Jesus saw** the lepers. Because Jesus always sees the marginalized who the rest of society walk by. Then, the **Samaritan saw** something that the other lepers missed. It wasn’t just that he was more polite and knew his manners well enough to come back and say “Thank you”.

He saw God in Jesus. He received from Jesus something more than a salve to cure his rash. No, this fellow, this Samaritan, could see, as no one else had, that Jesus could heal his soul. What can you and I see if we open the eyes of our hearts? Can we see that this is our community? We are responsible for each other and we are responsible to each other. We are to see Christ in each other, see Christ staying by our side in our doubt and in our faith, and see that this is the place to grow we have been planted.

ⁱ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx#tab3>