

Homily Trinity 11 28th August

Jeremiah 2.4-13

Hebrew 13.1-8,15-16

Luke 14.1,7-14

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Our reading today from the prophet Jeremiah is poignant and tragic on every level, and it makes clear the links between water and life, between spiritual watering or refreshment and growth listen he says

'Hear the word of the LORD,

Thus says the LORD:

What wrong did your ancestors find in me

that they went far from me,

and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves?

and then it goes on

...my people have changed their glory

for something that does not profit.

Be appalled, O heavens, at this,

be shocked, be utterly desolate

says the LORD,

for my people have committed two evils:

they have forsaken me,

the fountain of living water,

and dug out cisterns for themselves,

cracked cisterns

that can hold no water.'

Living water rains, runs, flows, and swirls. It washes away impurity, transports nutrients, constitutes leaf and stem, blood and bone. Where water flows, life abounds. Where there are uncontrolled floods there is destruction. Where water stagnates, disease takes hold. Where there is no water, life cannot even begin.

Human beings, you and I, are between 60-65% made up of water, so are many if most mammals and plants.

So, what is Jeremiah talking about?

Jeremiah is speaking of idolatry using the image of the crucial importance of water, as a metaphor for the life of the people, the Israelites have turned away from God, the God who brought them out of Egypt, so now they are cut off from the source of their true life and are suffering, and will suffer more.

They may not realise just how far they have moved away from God, and think they are still worshipping the true God, following God's good principles, even though they may feel empty and dry, and are drained by the life they are leading. But Jeremiah sees clearly how shocking their choices and their behaviour has become "Be appalled, O heavens, at this,

be shocked, be utterly desolate says the LORD,"

That's the sneaky thing about idolatry, it creeps up on us, following false gods, often feels ok and in line with our core values, we may not realise we are doing it until its well established. It's all about :

Trusting our own strength not God's, trusting our technologies and seeking to master our environments, rather than collaborating with God in bringing change and renewal, conquering obstacles rather than creatively engaging with them, trying to establish security for ourselves not realising its impossible, that risk is part of life . Too often we forget God's glorious gifts and God's calling to follow. Instead, we go after things with no real substance, no meaning, and no worth and the impact is really shocking.

Because we end up becoming like the things we look for, if we seek God and follow in the footsteps of Jesus we become more like Jesus. If we remain nourished by God as the source of our being, we live lives that are rich and full of grace and hope. If we set off away from God, we become dry and parched, with no energy no inner resources with which to fulfil our calling to love God and to love our neighbour

Our critical need for water, for God's nourishment, and for it's refreshing and cleansing properties, is reflected in the vast number of verses of scripture referring to literal and metaphorical or spiritual refreshment and to water. (just ask Google for a list)

The Medieval mystic Abbess Hildegard of Bingen, set many of them to music, but one of her own short prayers sums it up best, when the life of the spirit is dry, flavourless and difficult, she prayed 'O lord of my life, send my roots rain' fill me, or feed me, she is saying a very deep level.

Water is the source of all physical life, and the knowledge love and worship of God are the source of the life and strength of our souls. When we continually invite God into our daily living, to water our roots with love and with grace, then we are able to hear God's word, and to live mindful of God's word and God's call to us. Then we will remember the kingdom of God in which we are called to share, we will remember that God both

offers and seeks justice and mercy for all and from all, we are after all those to whom God wants to able say

‘For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

Or as the prophet Isaiah put it
the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;

And then writer to the Hebrews tells us today ‘Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

This all probably resonates with us now more than ever because we have just been reminded what a literal drought is like, having experienced it and the consequences of the leaking away and wastage of water supplies, and the heat, the floods and the wildfires all this summer. There is a long history of both drought and water supply as crucial aspects of life throughout recorded time.

The modern statistics are shocking just in the UK 3,170 million litres of water are lost through leaks every day. The average person uses 150 litres of water each day(about 33 gallons in old imperial measures). Industrial and Commercial use is an astonishing 1,300 million litres of water every day. The global demand for water is growing steadily by 1% a year. Now - we are still living in a land with water security but for how long ?

Water shortage, or water insecurity is widely predicted to be a major cause of future wars. The sadness is that that we have not learnt and remembered the lessons of the past and put their solutions into practice.

It was the ability of the Nabataeans to control the water supply that led to the rise of the desert city of Petra around the 4 century BCE and enabled them to withstand drought, siege and conquest by creating an artificial oasis. The area is visited by flash floods, but they managed these floods by the use of dams, cisterns, and water conduits. These innovations stored water for prolonged periods of drought and enabled

the city to prosper and stay safe.

They focused their energy on the essential. maintaining their sources of supply of water to sustain their communities and all the rest fell into place.

Now in our days not only the drought, but the impact of Covid and the war in Europe with all its effects on the cost of living, are so much harder for those who are poor that our calling to act with and for them is more urgent than ever.

We are called to be focused on the essentials of our faith and practice to sustain and nourish our communities for a just and sustainable future.

God knows, from experience how easy it is for people just like us to forget and to turn away from God, to be distracted by comfort, boredom, anxiety, or ambition. The lessons we need to learn are all about discerning that which is essential for our spiritual and community life and maintenance, so we are not distracted and do not forget or turn away.

So let us join with Hildegarde and pray with her O lord of my life send my roots rain. Amen.