

According to Mark . . . February 2019

The weather folks say that the “polar vortex” has split this winter, meaning that instead of a nice cold mass of air spinning over the north pole, all that cold will be directed north/south toward Canada and, by extension, to all of us in Northern New England. The forecasters are predicting a very cold and stormy (and hence snowy) February.

It brings to mind a spiritual exercise for us all. We’ve been through this before. Predictions of the future which are doomy and gloomy, whether it’s the economy, our politics, our common earth home, our kids’ futures - and yet, the world keeps spinning, and doesn’t come to an end, nor will it anytime soon. But there’s still something to worry about and prepare for. Are we destined to bounce from crisis to crisis throughout our lives? What can we do other than buy more bags of Sno-Melt? What exactly is certain in our lives other than constant worries?

These questions of how we cope with our earthly lives are why Church is so important, because God has a lot to say about coping, hoping, and the future. Read the lectionary for Feb 17: Jeremiah 17:5-10. God uses nature to teach us about faith, because these images are connected to growth, nourishment, renewal, and seasons of our lives. When we put our trust in God we are blessed like a tree - green and perpetually fruit-bearing. If we worry too much about the world and trying to control it or constantly moving from crisis to crisis, we are like the shrub, with no way to thrive and alone in a parched desert.

But what about the moments, or even months and years when our trust in God doesn’t feel fruitful and we just feel like the desert shrub? Jesus tells us in Luke 6:17-26 of the Beatitudes, and for each present reality of our spirits-poverty, hunger, weeping, hatred-there is a promise to come. The poor will reap the Kingdom, the hungry filled, the weeping will laugh again, and ones excluded will leap for joy. Now, there’s no timing on these promises, and Jesus doesn’t magically lift them away, even for the ones listening that day when he says this. These gifts will come; just not likely today.

Jeremiah’s tree paints a picture of timing. The green, fruitful tree is our future. But the tree is not fearful when the heat comes; its leaves are still green. Even in darkness, the tree grows. Even when it doesn’t rain, the tree will survive. When everything around the tree tries to take its life away, the tree will not die. Because in the Lord’s care, the tree will thrive.

So it is with us. The future is a difficult place to put our trust. So is the present. And the past gives us the worldly message and the tough lesson that we shouldn’t trust the present or future. But Jesus and Jeremiah remind us that it is not the FUTURE itself that we should trust. It is God. When we trust in ourselves alone, we become the shrub. But trusting in God who leads us through the troubled present lets us move forward through that long February, or job loss, or illness of us or a loved one, to the other side, a future of hope.

In our despair, God holds the past, present and future, and our challenge is to live in both conditions of our present reality and hopeful future, knowing that we are both and at once hungry and full, weeping

and laughing, hated and loved. For every part of life, God lets us know that God is with us every step of the way. To live otherwise, Jesus says (using the rich and powerful, or those living entirely worldly and not helping or considering others in all they do) will give a future filled with sorrow and emptiness. The other side for those folks is not blessing, but suffering, because God plays no role in their lives.

So it's February. Winter is here. But spring will always come. Take heart, dear friends, and bring someone who needs to hear these words with you some cold, frosty Sunday to join us for a warm welcome at TCC.

Pastor Mark