

## **Jeremiah 17:5-10**

Thus says the Lord: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord. They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it? I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.\*

## **Trust is Trust** - February 13, 2022

*Jeremiah 17:5-10*

One of the fundamental necessities of living has to be love. From the Beatles' singing, "All you need is Love" to Jesus' saying, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another," the idea of love is essential to being human. As the Apostle Paul put it in his first letter to the Corinthians, as translated in Eugene Peterson's Message version: Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't strut, Doesn't have a swelled head, Doesn't force itself on others, Isn't always "me first," Doesn't fly off the handle, Doesn't keep score of the sins of others, Doesn't revel when others grovel, Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth, Puts up with anything, Trusts God always, Always looks for the best, Never looks back, But keeps going to the end. Love never dies.

Where would we be without love? Love is the lubricant that enables us to be with one another. I say "lubricant" because love, like oil on a hinge, enables all the parts to function together smoothly. Let's face it. We are all different from one another. We also share many things in common. Yet inevitably, our differences will result in friction. Friction between individuals, friction within families, friction within communities, groups, organizations, religions, and nations. It is very easy to allow our differences and the friction that clashing differences creates to overwhelm us, consume us, even destroy us.

It is love, and only love, that enables us to work together despite our differences and instead we can embrace our individuality. Sure, we find ourselves in situations every day that we don't want to be in. We have jobs we may not like. We have family members we may not want to be with. And, for a time, we can put up with these situations for a short while. But eventually, if we're in a situation for an extended period of time, love has to be the only long term solution to preserve our own well-being. Love keeps us together, just as the lack of love inevitably drives us apart. As long as humanity exists, we need love to ensure our very survival. How else can we explain the incredible suffering and all the challenges we face in our world if not because of a profound lack of love?

Yet, as much as love enables us to get along with each other, in spite of our differences, there is something perhaps even more necessary than love or perhaps can be seen as an indispensable companion of love and that something is trust.

What is trust? Well, among the dictionary definitions of trust are: to rely on the truthfulness or accuracy of; to place confidence in; to hope or expect confidently. Whereas love is what we actively

do in order to interact successfully with each other, trust is really a set of assumptions we make about how the world works so we don't have to think or worry all the time.

For example, when we trust something or someone, we expect that things about the situation or individual will be the same today, tomorrow, for a long time to come. I trust that the sun will rise tomorrow. I trust there will be air to breathe and water to drink. I trust when I drive my car that there will be stop signs, and roads and gas stations wherever I want to go. I trust when I open a can of beans, the contents will be safe for me to eat. On the human level, I trust that my partner is supportive of me, is not going to hurt me, and will act and speak in fairly predictable ways.

When you think about it, we have to have a lot of trust in how the world works and we live in the hope that the things which happened yesterday will continue to happen tomorrow. Imagine a world which is unstable. Imagine being in a situation where your surroundings were fundamentally untrustworthy. Imagine if you didn't know how the world would behave from one day to the next. Perhaps you couldn't trust the water supply. Perhaps you couldn't trust whether the food you ate or the medicines you took were safe. Perhaps you couldn't trust that when you called the police they would come and when they came they would do the right thing.

On a human level, what if you didn't trust your partner, or your boss, or your elected officials? What if life were unstable and unpredictable every day and you had no certainty about anything? What kind of world would that be?

Friends, the reality is that for many people: the world is not a trustworthy place. The world, for many, is unstable, unpredictable, and operates without regard to love. We take a great deal for granted in this country. Compared with most, ours is rather stable. Nothing is perfect, of course, but in general, government is not corrupt, schools function, food and water are safe, the electric grid is always on.

Of course in our individual lives, we may be experiencing the lack of trust in our relationships, our jobs, or our economic stability. We may awake each morning with no clear expectations of how our day might go. That may be your situation right now and if it is, I'm very sorry.

Without love, and without trust, anything approaching a normal life is nearly impossible. From time to time, I suspect most of us have experienced significant upheavals in our lives. We've had to face situations which changed our lives dramatically, whether it was the loss of a family member or a job, or perhaps a natural disaster of some kind. Now despite these upheavals, life most of the time life does reset and we are able to settle into a new normal. Sometimes it's better, sometimes it's worse, but at least we regain a sense of stability and trust.

Today's scripture is all about trust. We've learned about the prophet Jeremiah, the man who had the worst job in the world. Jeremiah was called by God to constantly tell the rulers of Israel that the nation was going to be destroyed because of their disobedience. Throughout his long career, Jeremiah tried all kinds of ways and made all kinds of dire prophecies to get the leaders to listen to him. But, they didn't. Quite the contrary. Poor Jeremiah suffered terribly: beaten, starved, thrown to the bottom of a well, constantly laughed at...you get the picture. But loyal to his nation to the end, Jeremiah stayed with them even after his predictions came true and the people of Israel went into exile. Yet once in exile, Jeremiah's prophecy's changed. Instead of preaching doom, he told the people that someday they would return to Israel. Nonetheless, what a challenging ministry he had!

How did Jeremiah survive? How could he stand, year after year, to be the bearer of bad news to his own people? There was, of course, only one way. Jeremiah had trust. Jeremiah had trust in God. He spoke, "Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit."

This friends, is the nature of trust, trust in God. It is, when you consider it, the only real trust there is. Throughout our lives, we are going to experience love and we are going to experience the loss of love. We are going to have times when our worlds are trustworthy and secure and other times, perhaps many other times, when our worlds are decidedly not secure.

The essential question of life is what happens when our trust and our love is in short supply. What do we do when that happens? What do we do when our lack of trust and our lack of love is the rule, rather than the exception?

As most of you are aware, I spent ten years living in southern Africa. During my time, I found and experienced a lot of love. In fact, that Africa continues to exist is primarily because of love. Life there very often is lived on the edge. It doesn't take much to disrupt the often tenuous balance between living and dying. Without love, without the mutual support of friends and families, there are times when people wouldn't get by. There is a level of communal help and responsibility which simply does not exist here. Fortunes and situations in Africa change inevitably and often suddenly. You may be doing well and on top today. Tomorrow may be a different story.

Therefore, trust in Africa is not and cannot be rooted in human institutions. As Jeremiah said, "Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from

the Lord. They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.”

In other words, Africans know that human leaders and human institutions are very fallible and often fail. This may well be a lesson we are learning in our own nation. What human beings create, they can also destroy. What then?

I want to share with you the story of one of my best friends, a man named Abel Mbewe. You may be familiar with his name. For over a year he has been part of our prayer list. I have been sending him the recorded version of our worship, our Taizé service, and our Daily Prayer service. Abel served my congregation, St. Columba’s Presbyterian Church, in Lusaka, Zambia as our Session Clerk, and continued to do so after I left Zambia 1999.

Abel joined the Lord a week ago Thursday after a long battle with prostate cancer. He was in and out of hospitals in Zambia and India receiving various treatments. I’m sure they prolonged his life but he was often in great pain.

Abel and I would text each other. He would send a video or a meme he found interesting and we’d chat about it. He never liked to discuss his condition and only did so when I asked directly. However, one thing he never stopped doing was praising God for the many blessings he had, despite his condition. I did not know he was nearing the end of his journey when he wrote, “Today I celebrate my 64th birthday bed ridden due to prostate cancer. This evening I will be admitted to Fairview Hospital for blood transfusion. I thank God for additional year...”

Now you might say, “What has trusting in God bought your friend? He has died and suffered in the process.” Of course he has died. Sadly he suffered. However, friends, the simple truth is that we will all die at some point. We may hope that time is a long way off, but none of us knows for certain.

Trust, like its companions faith and love cannot and will not prevent our deaths. They will not necessarily prevent tragedies from befalling us or our communities. However, Abel knew what having trust in God really bought him. Abel’s trust in God lessened his fear when the heat of suffering was so great. It reduced his anxiety when he learned that he would have to endure more chemo and more radiation. Abel’s trust in God, surrounded by the love of hundreds of friends and family assured him that in life and in death he was and remains a child of God.

Isn’t that assurance, friends, what we really all need? Isn’t that confidence in life beyond life what we all want? This is what my friend Abel knew and this, brother and sisters, is what you can know, too, simply by having trust in God.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.