A Pastoral Letter from Father Robert Baker
Christ Episcopal Church Bradenton
Wednesday, August 26, 2020
Week of the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

26 August, 2020

My Dear Family in Christ,

This coming Sunday will be the 13th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 17). Our collect is truly wonderful. In it we petition that God will, "Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works." In so praying, we are acknowledging that we are completely dependent upon God for our lives, our joy and for every good fruit we produce. The real irony of our acknowledged dependence upon God is that this dependence does not make us passive or inactive. Our dependence upon God makes us strong agents in God's mission for humanity.

Consider the prophet Jeremiah. There have been few human beings who have had to endure the opposition and injustice that Jeremiah did. He spoke an unpopular truth, and for that he was harassed, imprisoned, and kidnapped. The truth he spoke was that Judah would fall to the Babylonians as a judgement from God. Judah should therefore submit to the yoke of Babylon.

Jeremiah spoke the truth, but what made this truth so unpalatable was that just one hundred years before, Isaiah had prophesied that God would miraculously and at the last minute intervene to save Jerusalem from the armies of Assyria. God did indeed intervene and so in subsequent generations there was an unsubstantiated belief that no matter the religious and moral state of the Judeans, God would always intervene for His chosen. The people and officials of Judah wanted to hear, "God will save this city no matter what." What they, in fact, were hearing from Jeremiah was, "Being God's chosen carries with it certain responsibilities. You have failed to hold up your end of the bargain. This city will be destroyed. Submit to Babylon."
You can see why Jeremiah was not a popular or well-loved prophet.

Jeremiah encountered fierce opposition. Yet he drew his strength from God and overcame. He writes, “Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart.” I wonder if you have ever felt like you were facing insurmountable circumstances, like the world was conspiring against you. Maybe you have a dream and well-intentioned people are telling you your aspirations are too grand, just learn to settle. Beloved there is no dream from God that is too big. If God put it in your heart, God will help you. Perhaps you are facing a moral quandary and well-intentioned people are advising you to take the easy way out. “It is just a little sin,” they say. Remember God will never tempt you beyond what you are able but will with the temptation provide a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Just as Jeremiah received nurture, comfort and strength from God, so God desires to bless you, nourish you and strengthen you. God desires to shower grace upon you through the Word, sacraments, prayer and the encouragement of your faith family. Dream big, aspire large. God loves you and your faith family loves you.

Grace and Peace,

Robert+

Useful Links:
Lectionary page for 2020
https://www.lectionarypage.net/CalndrsIndexes/Calendar2020.html
State of Florida COVID-19 page:
http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseasesandconditions/COVID-19/
Centers for Disease Control COVID-19 page:
Diocesan of Southwest Florida Covid-19 Page:
http://episcopalswfl.org/covid.html/