

[Readings: Jer. 17: 5-8; Ps. 1; 1 Cor. 15:12, 16-20; Luke 6:17, 20-26]

There are two kinds of people, as the saying usually begins. And Scripture tends to bear this out with numerous points of comparisons between the just and the wicked, or the wise person and the fool. Today's readings cluster around the contrasting of those who are blessed versus those who are cursed.

Although such black-and-white distinctions seem harsh in our typically grey perception of reality, biblical language is quite clear that we must expect a time of foreclosure known as Judgment Day, when the chance to change our course, our life path, is behind us.

Many of us would certainly like to end the suspense and know as soon as possible, where we are going to end up for all eternity.

If you want to take your spiritual pulse right now, the prophet Jeremiah suggests, it's fairly easy. If you place your trust in people and things, you'll be sorry. If your trust is in God, you have nothing to fear. I have heard more than one person say. "I trust nobody."

The prophetic and wisdom traditions both agree that the issue of which side you're on is cut-and-dried. You're either a "barren bush in the desert that enjoys no change of season, but stands in a lava waste" (which can't be good), or you're a "tree planted beside the waters that shows no distress even in the year of drought" (which sounds much better). The only difference is whether your hope is rooted in God. All other distinguishing factors are meaningless.

So your accumulated stuff doesn't matter, and your good deeds won't make the grade.

You can't brown-nose your way through this one just because you go to church, behave yourself, and write a check to the missions once in a while. Ultimately, either you trust in this world, your personal and spiritual resources, and the good opinion of others, or you place your confidence in God.

What makes this *Good News* is that it's a path available to ANYONE and EVERYONE. Even the diehard sinner can do this and end up planted next to the saints in Heaven by that same stream of living water. This news tends to make us diehard sinners very happy, and everybody else a little disgruntled.

You mean, all that straight-and-narrow living doesn't buy any perks in the hereafter? You mean that God doesn't owe me anything for passing up some great near occasions of sin? Exactly. It all relies upon God's mercy and grace.

An old Arab proverb says: trust in God, but tie your camel. Trusting in God does not mean living like an idiot and taking foolish chances. Jesus advised his disciples, "You must be wise as serpents, and innocent as doves." He also said that if you build your house on sand, don't be surprised when it washes away. The word used here is not simply *sand*, but a veritable *wash*: Don't build your house where the water habitually comes, or you are asking for trouble!

Jesus took His own advice when He met the devil in the desert. The devil urges Him to throw Himself off a pinnacle and to trust that God would keep Him safe. That's not a working definition of trusting in God, Jesus assures Satan. That's called tempting God!

What Jesus means by trusting in God is evident in the listing of the Beatitudes. Those who trust in God live out of the conviction that

being poor, needy, sad, or despised NOW, is the smallest and least important part of the story. What awaits those who suffer these conditions faithfully now in this world is the day of restoration in the Kingdom of God.

Of course, the reverse is necessarily true. Those who are comfortable, content, and well-received NOW will be bitterly disappointed if they rely only and exclusively on their present happiness. In the Kingdom of God, those who counted on their own resources and self-sufficiency will find themselves poor and needy.

Somehow, our idea of trusting in God has been reduced to a vague sentimental feeling, a soft emotion we keep next to our lucky socks and our rabbit's foot. Or perhaps it's more like playing the heavenly stock market. None of us wastes time to put our trust in God while we are sitting in the waiting room at the hospital.

But if we don't get the results we wanted, we become outraged that God has been untrustworthy. This isn't trust: This is making just another worldly investment and anticipating a worldly outcome.

Saint Paul defines Christian hope down to precisely one element: our faith in the Resurrection of Jesus. Either it's real, or we're fools to share in the story of the Church. Either Christ has been raised, or death is the winner-take-all at the end of history. Confidence in the Risen One is the barometer of our trust in the Lord.

So... Do YOU believe? We say it every Sunday. We have to place all our hopes in the *big one*, the contest between death's finality and life unending. Because eternal life is the only thing worthy of our hope, when you come right down to it. Everything else goes to rust, moths, and decay, and in surprisingly short order.

If you don't believe that Jesus rose from the dead, then our faith is useless. You are wasting your time here. We are still stuck in the muck and mire of our sins. We are the most pitiful of all human beings! And the only path for all eternity for us is condemnation and Hell! (Have a nice day!) My Uncle Frank used to say, "I don't care where I end up – in Heaven or in Hell. I'll know people in both places! I wonder where HE ended up! I'm putting my money on Heaven!"

Those who trust in God are blessed, and those who don't get a bad case of "the woes." This isn't just God playing Santa Claus at the end-times, by the way: It's a reality check. If we trust in God, we get the eternal happiness that only God can offer. And if we cling to the world, we get the world, complete with its expiration date. God takes our free will very seriously. It would be good if we did, too, and examined our choices more carefully.

Practice forgiveness. Lose yourself serving others. Pray daily, early and often. Offer hospitality to others. Share your faith with others whose faith is alive. Take God's hand and walk together. This is how we trust. And how it will keep us green and growing. And ending up on the right side of eternity! AMEN!