

[Readings: Jeremiah 17: 5-8; Psalm 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 tipping point has been reached and the chance to change our course is behind us.

Judgment Day can be variously interpreted as simply the end of our lives, or more emphatically the end of time and world itself. Jesus spoke of his "hour" as both a kind of revelation and also a proving ground for who he was. Maybe we can think of Judgment Day as our "hour," when we find out who we truly are based on the summation of all our choices.

But many of us would certainly like to end the suspense and know as soon as possible what may be the last word on the subject of *us*. 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.

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, you either 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. 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 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 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 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 bank on their present happiness. In the Kingdom of God, those who counted on their own resources will find themselves penniless and wanting.

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 rabbit's foot. Or perhaps it's more like playing the celestial stock market. We put our trust in God 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. 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. 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.

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.

Much of modern life, even in our Church, can seem, spiritually, like stretches of wasteland. Yet in even the bleakest surroundings, some people's spirits flourish and thrive. They stay connected to the sources of life. What can you do to "plant yourself" where living water flows? Here are a few ideas to show your trust in God: Receive the sacraments regularly. That means frequent Mass and Communion and regular participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Practice forgiveness both in the giving and receiving. Lose yourself serving others. We have Warming Center this week. May we see Jesus in our guests, and, more importantly, may our guests see Jesus in us! Pray daily, early and often. Offer hospitality to others. Share your faith with others whose faith is alive. Open your heart to grace throughout your day. Take God's hand and walk together. This is how we trust. And how it will keep us green and growing.
AMEN!