

Jesus said, “The truth will set you free...”

And there I sit, trying to write a reflection for today and thinking, “The truth will set me free, sure, but first it will leave me frazzled.”

Truth is kind of up for grabs these days for a lot of reasons, but it has been not the easiest of things to nail down. Like what does a parent do with the truth. You see your child heading in a certain direction, and given your life experience you can predict with some accuracy that the road they are on could easily lead to disaster, and yet what do you do with that information? Do you speak up, or do you keep your mouth shut and let the chips fall pretty much where you expected them to fall? Do you protect them from the consequences of their actions or do you button it and support them when things unfold?

It is a hard lesson to learn, but it is a basic truth: that actions have consequences. If you drink, and you drive, eventually somebody is going to get hurt. IF you touch that element, it will hurt. Try that very same trick on your bike with the no hands on the gravel road (not at all speaking from personal experience) and oh dear, you wreck the end of your finger at best. If you have unprotected sex, well, that road leads to pregnancy, among other things. And everybody’s got to learn it for themselves. It’s a parent’s dilemma. And you hope they will learn that action-consequence connection early, while the stakes are low, but learn it they will.

Both Jesus and Jeremiah were dealing with that basic truth at a deep and societal level. Our reading from Jeremiah is a collection of wisdom sayings that talk about what gives life meaning and purpose. The people of Judah were well familiar with the parched desert wasteland, and in contrast to the rich fertile oasis where trees drew moisture from the underground streams, and miraculously

produced fruit in the middle of the desert. The passage invites us to that basic truth both sides of which function in our lives at various times. When we root our lives in God, it is like being rooted by the streams, so that when the rough seasons come, and they will come to all of us, we will not be left desolate. On the other hand, if we root ourselves if we put our trust elsewhere, well, we face dire consequences in the dry seasons.

Similarly, our passage from Luke's gospel is a collection of wisdom sayings called the beatitudes which, in Luke's version at least, lays out the same contrast. What you choose in which to root your life has consequences. Blessed are those who root their life in the ways of God. And woe to you if you root your life in your own power to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps or in riches and so on. Those roots will not serve you well. What you choose the source and hope of your life to be has consequences. Root deep in the ways of God. Ultimately that will serve you well.

Unfortunately, such a message is much like the message we would like to give our children. Your actions have consequences, but our children (and I can remember doing this myself) often point to the one that got off, the one that got away with it, the one who didn't get pregnant, the one who drank and drove and made it home safe. The groups is, the good guy doesn't always seem to prosper, the dog-eat-dog capitalist who became his comfy millionaire self by squashing every poor sucker that came along, on occasion, lives a nice long and comfortable life on the backs of many, and comes out, (as far as we can see) smelling like a rose. Occasionally, the one who lives the exemplary life, cares for family, gives, shares, is conscientious, hard working, also can't catch a break in life. Occasionally, or perhaps more often than we care to admit, honesty does not pay, on the short term

at least, and its that very problem that both Jeremiah and Jesus are trying to address.

Even if it doesn't seem to pay off, even if it doesn't look like a drought is in the offing, play beside the stream, the say. Choose life, choose justice, choose to make a place at the table for the poor, the hated, the excluded, reviled, defamed. For in God's realm, ultimately, in the long run, that's what really matters. That's what really has lasting value. That is what will weather the storm. And it may not pay off at the time, and it may require sacrifice in which you can't see the pay off at all. But on the long haul of life, those roots of justice, of love, of kindness, of grace will serve.

So far so good? Nothing too startling yet?

Then why do these scriptures make us so uncomfortable? Well, I believe it is because they cut both ways. They talk about those who are blessed- we like that. Matthew's gospel only included those in the speech. And they also talk about the woe to you- which we don't like. But the truth, the frazzling truth is, life cuts both ways too. There are choices that lead to life, and choices that lead to death. There are healthy choices and unhealthy choices. There are choices that build up relationships and choices that sour relationships.

I guess what makes us so uncomfortable about these passages is that they lead us to consider the reality of sin. There. I said it. I used the "s" word. I almost never use the "s" word because it has been used as a bludgeon to drive people into guilt and shame, neither of which are particularly productive in my view. However, the fact is, there are choices that we make that lead to wholeness and choices we make that lead to brokenness, choices that liberate us, and choices that imprison us. Choices

that build relationships and choices that destroy them. Choices that bring us closer to God, and choices that pull us away from God. Choices that help our roots to grow deep in good soil and choices that keep them shallow and vulnerable. That is just life.

And sin is both a choice and a state of being. We since when we choose to take a step down the path that leads to brokenness for ourselves and others. We find ourselves in the state of sin when we are down that path sufficiently that we look around and realize that we are left with a while bunch of choices none of which lead to the abundant life we were made for. We are in sin when we realize that we have planted our roots in the wrong places and now we can't find water.

And that is the very state of being Jeremiah and Jesus are both warning us against. Are we frazzled yet, by the truth of life as it is in the world? At this point you may well be asking when the good news is coming along.

Well in a funny sort of way the good news comes from an elder in my life who gave me a piece of wisdom a while back that is kind of funny but speaks to me of the wisdom of Jesus and Jeremiah and encourages us to root ourselves in places that will serve us in the long run. She said, "You'd better take a good look at where you are headed, or you may end up where you are going." You'd better take a good look at your actions or they may well led to their logical consequences. And if our actions are rooted deep in the ways of God: in justice, and love, in compassion and truth, in peace and self-respect, well the good news is that, "you shall not be like the tree in the desert that cannot find relief in the drought, No, instead you shall be like the tree planted by water, You need not fear the heat when it comes (and the heat will come from time to time). Your leaves shall stay green, you will not cease to bear fruit. You may be frazzled for a time, but in due course, it will be well with your soul. Amen.