

Epiphany 6  
Jeremiah 17:5-8

2/17/19  
C

**BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO TRUSTS IN THE LORD, WHOSE TRUST IS THE LORD.**

The winter of 1886-1887 brought great ruin to Montana's cattle industry. Concerned for his 5,000 head of cattle, the owner of the OH Ranch sent a letter to his foreman asking how his herd was faring in the severe cold and heavy snow. In answer to the owner's inquiry, the foreman simply mailed a postcard of a small water-color of a single cow -- ribs showing through its hide, standing in the blinding snow, encircled by ravenous wolves -- painted by a young ranch hand named Charles Russell.

"Waiting for a Chinook," as that water color became known, started Russell's career as an artist. Surrounded by such many and great dangers, that cow's single hope was that the warm, spring Chinook winds would soon come to bring warmth, and food, and life. What's that saying? "One picture is worth a 1,000 words." We can relate to that cow, not just because of the weather these past weeks. As we feebly struggle on this side of heaven, it seems the challenges and temptations of earthly life never seem to stop.

"Waiting for a Chinook" helps us understand the words of Jeremiah in our Old Testament lesson,

Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit (vv.7-8).

My Dear Friends in Christ, God has Good News for us. Our spiritual Chinook has come. In this season of Epiphany, God has appeared to us in

Jesus of Nazareth and made Himself known to us in the life, words, and work of His only-begotten Son. In this valley of the shadow of death, Christ Jesus is our hope. In the words of St. Paul, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed (2 Cor 4:8)."

Jeremiah wrote the words of our Old Testament to people in need of a Chinook wind; they were crushed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down.

God delivered His children from the slavery of Egypt, led them through 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, and brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey. Israel became the richest, most prosperous people on all the earth. But they proved to be a hard-hearted, stiff-necked people. They rebelled against God. God sent Jeremiah and other prophets to call them to repentance. When their pagan neighbors threatened to invade and conquer them, they would not listen. Instead of fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things, they made silly, useless alliances with other pagan nations, placing their trust in them to save them. So Jeremiah writes, as a warning to them,

Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land (vv. 5-6).

The Israelites trusted in themselves and their earthly neighbors and brought disaster and ruin upon themselves. In this life of strokes and coughs, heart attacks and fever, cancer and car crashes, abortion and Alzheimer's, pall bearers and Parkinson's, what are we to do? Do we fear, love, and trust in God above all things? Or, in the weakness of our

faith, do we turn our hearts away from God to make useless alliances with this world, to trust in human wisdom and flesh to save us?

Do you ever find yourself playing a game of “If...then”? If I had more money, then I could be at peace. If I had that new toy, then I could be happy. If I he or she were my spouse, then I could real joy in my life. If those fools weren't my parents, then my life would be good. If I could just drown my sorrows or find the right happy pill, then the pain will go away. The “If...then” game so illustrates the way we poor sinners think, reason, and act.

The Apostle John warns us, “Do not love the world or the things in the world ... For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life – is not from God but is from the world (1 Jn 2:15-16).” In the challenges and temptations we face, it is so very easy to trust in the things of this present age, especially our works, and our stuff. We've pulled ourselves up by our bootstraps, we've won the accolades of praise of our neighbors. We have our free time, and money to enjoy it. But, what becomes of us when we trust in ourselves especially when the heat comes or in the year of drought? Like the Israelites of old, only disaster and ruin await us.

II. As we feebly struggle, Paul directs us to the Easter resurrection of Jesus Christ, “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (v.20)”.

Dear Christian Friends, hope is not something we find inside ourselves. Hope is God's gift to you through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Son of God took on human flesh and dwelt among us. And He took upon Himself all the times you made useless alliances with the world, all the times you feared, loved, and trusted in yourself, **all your**

**sin**, and He carried it all to the cross, where endured death as the punishment for it all. And because He died that death, you, Dear Child of God, are forgiven. You have that assurance because “in fact Christ has been raised from the dead,” which means God the accepted His Son’s sacrifice for the sins of all the world.

In our baptism into Christ, we have been united to Him in death and His resurrection. And because we have been raised with Jesus, we have hope, not a hope in the earthly sense of “I hope things will get better,” but the certainty of knowing things will get better. And all the troubles, all the sorrows, all the things that crush us, perplex us, and cause us to despair, are all defeated. Our greatest enemy, death itself, is destroyed. The Easter resurrection means that we shall be delivered from all the trials, tribulations, and tears of this valley of the shadow of death. Jesus says it this way in our Gospel, “Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven (6:23).”

III. But, for today, we live life under the cross. Like that cold, starving cow waiting for the Chinook winds, we wait for our deliverance from this vale of tears. But, as we wait, we do not wait as those who have no hope.

Hope comes from faith, faith that our lives are a gift from God and each day is lived in His Fatherly hands. And, faith itself is a gift from God, a gift He gives to you through the hearing of His Word and in the Sacraments. With the faith God gives you, you fear, love, and trust in Him alone.

On this side of heaven, trials and tribulations will come. But, let us ever remember that God is not punishing us. God does not want harm and ruin to come to us; our eyes to fill with tears. God allows sorrow, toil, and woe into our lives, so that in the words of that song we learned as children

in Sunday School, we may see that we are weak, but He is strong. His grace has sent His Son to be our Savior and raised Him to life again. His grace has brought us to faith in Christ and gives us hope. And, we remember that blessed promise of Scripture, “Hope does not disappoint us (Ro 5:5, NIV).” His grace will see us through every joy and sorrow of earthly life, until that day of our exodus from this land of sin and death.

To use the words of Jeremiah, rooted in Christ, we will be strong even when the heat of the day comes; we will have no worries, even in a year of drought.

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.**