

Sermon for 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Trinity yr A

[Jeremiah 20.7-13](#)

[Romans 6.1b-11](#)

[Matthew 10.24-39](#)

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord our rock and our redeemer.

Well here we are firmly in what is called Ordinary Time, Trinity Season or whatever else you want to call it. so how ordinary is it ?, and the next big Liturgical event in view is Advent, the turn of the Church's Year, when we get to throw away our old Lectionaries – that's unless you take notice of Creationtide ( as I know some would like us to do ) in September, tying in with the Orthodox Church, who keep September 1<sup>st</sup> as Creation day. That's all in the realm of Future possibility, and you should look at the Pew Slip for more about our Eco-Church Status.

But what of our readings? Let's take them in order, starting with Jeremiah

Some strong language here – what Jeremiah uses is the sort of language which might be used of seduction – by God- and indeed some writers have spoken of their encounter with the Divine in terms, using imagery, which would have been felt, by some people, to be quite unsuitable for a church environment, where children *and their mothers!!!* might be present. ( I was interested to find you can still find second hand copies of that little book 'What I can not tell my mother is not fit for me to know')

But there is perhaps here an invitation to speak to and of God, not in the hushed, reverent tones which might be felt to be appropriate- or the language of Spirit filled worship, with it's possibility of divinely inspired utterance, but seriously, from the bottom of a heart which has felt some of the world's pain and distress. Sometimes, like Jeremiah we feel

'..then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.'

inspiring us to speech and to action. And the people we would count as friends are sometimes not all they would seem to be.

even the words from Romans, which can be interpreted spiritually ' dying to sin, rising to new life in Christ' can also be seen in a very sharp sense – that life and death are the inseparable parts of life, what begins in Birth, and maybe Baptism, ends in a Funeral.

Matthew has been seen by some scholars ( probably most notably + John Shelby Spong) as writing at a time when his audience was largely Jewish, possibly still following the Synagogue worship and writing his Gospel story to link in with the Synagogue Liturgical Year, so this would form part of the period between Shavuot and Rosh Hashanah – Shavuot remember happens at the same time of year as Pentecost, and Rosh Hashanah in late September.

Matthew does not shrink from telling them (and us) the cost of discipleship. There are hard, painful words in our readings, which form a continuation of a theme of persecution begun earlier in Matthew. I've quoted some of them from this reading as the 'for meditation' on the pew slip – that's not meditation of the comforting warm glow inside variety, which lowers your blood pressure and, some would say, your cholesterol, but the hard reflection which comes from living in a real world, attempting to resolve some very real spiritual issues. I think that we all need to reflect on the degree to which we can claim ownership of or take responsibility for such words as these. Do we really accept them? Should they be there at all? Is this what the Bible is for?

For some of our brothers and sisters the choice of what Faith they hold central, the issue of making a choice of Faith, of changing Faith- things which in the Liberal West ( is it really liberal? I'll leave that for you to discuss!) are often represented as little more than another lifestyle option – become literally matters of Life – or Death – with Family Honour at stake, and the need to find another community to replace the one they may be facing leaving, an urgent necessity.

For those who heard Matthew's words, almost 2000 years ago, such questions of faith and identity must have been pressing, as they remain today for many people.

And history has shown us that those we thought of as friends can fall away or turn against us in time of need -as Jeremiah seems to have found– while true friendship can appear in unlikely and unexpected places.

So what of our own lives? How do we relate to those of other faiths? That's become a very real question over recent time, with those claiming to be motivated by a particular faith tradition seeing in it as a reason to engage in acts of violence against people who seem to be in many cases simply randomly chosen, those who just happened to be there .

The representatives of the faith communities they claim to come from usually protest that the 'terrorists' are not representative – and we too easily forget that only a few hundred years ago, people who claimed to be motivated by Christianity, went out committing acts of violence, Go to [Montségur](#) and think on the Cathars, or consider the Crusades, soaked in the blood of innocent victims. Sometimes the word Crusade is used lightly, without giving thought to the baggage it still carries for some communities .

On a more positive note, some, I know, have joined our Moslem brothers and sisters at the breaking of the daytime fast which Moslems make during the Holy Month of Ramadan, now just ending, at this time of year in Europe often not broken till half past nine, or later' in the evening. The Islamic calendar moves against the Gregorian one by some 19 days each year, bringing years in which the fast is especially hard in the long days of the northern ( or southern) summer, away from the more equal days and nights of the lands of Islam's roots.

Perhaps, by such various acts of solidarity, we can slowly erode the prejudices which provide the soil for all forms of extremism – or is it the case that people who are easily led, and those who would lead them will always be with us?

It would be nice to think not, but we live in an imperfect world, as Jesus found when he came up against the Roman Empire, and I suspect that this is a problem which will be with us as long a humans live on this planet. So what do we do?

Well we campaign, and continue to campaign, for social justice, for the forces which are against us do not rest in their efforts, so neither must we. We invite people to renew their relationships with the created world, to care for our environment, to think carefully where their money is being invested – and so on – the list is probably endless. And yes it may separate us from those who claim to love us, to have our best interests at heart – but it may also turn up some surprising friends, people who come from backgrounds and cultures and faiths we hadn't really given much thought to. So we need to pray for Discernment, for guidance to find a way among the problems this world brings.

Amen