

The Lectionary with Vicar

The appointed readings for this Sunday are taken from Jeremiah 28:5-9; Romans 7:1-13; Matthew 10:34-42. I encourage you to open your Bibles and read through these passages with me.

Jeremiah 28:5-9

Today we read about a short interaction between Jeremiah and Hananiah. Hananiah was a false prophet who had been proclaiming that peace and prosperity were coming. In the face of the threat from Babylon, Hananiah was telling a good message that people wanted to hear – God would protect them and it would all be over soon. Unfortunately, Jeremiah had the Word from God that it would not be over soon, leading to our confrontation today.

There are two things of note in the passage. The first is Jeremiah's response to Hananiah's message: "Amen." Just because Jeremiah knew it would not happen does not mean that he didn't want it to happen. He says that he sincerely hopes that God will do exactly what Hananiah said, but Jeremiah knows that bad things are to come instead.

And so, Jeremiah gives a way to tell a false prophet. First, check to see if the message is the same as what previous prophets said. All the old prophets spoke of famine, war, and pestilence. Since Hananiah is saying something different, we come to point number two: when a prophet has a message that is too good to be true, just wait and see if it happens. If it does, the prophet is from God. If it does not happen, then you can know that this was a false prophet.

Romans 7:1-13

Paul continues his letter by discussing the relationship between the law and sin. He begins with a discussion of whether or not we are still under the law. He uses the analogy of a marriage, which lasts only as long as both partners are still living. Since the law from the Old Testament is a covenant, it works in a similar way, says Paul. The law only applies to those who are still living. The twist here is that we have all died in Christ, at our baptism, and have been raised to a new life. Now we are no longer living under the law but under Christ and His grace.

Paul then explains that sin is only recognized as sin by the law, and even more troubling, when we know the law, we are more likely to sin because we now know what not to do. This is a restatement of an earlier idea in Romans that those who know the law will be judged more harshly because they will be held to the standard of the revealed law, whereas those who do not know the law will be judged according to the law written on their hearts. This isn't to say that people are better off not knowing the law, but it is to say that just knowing what God's will is isn't enough – and we will never be good enough to fulfill all of it.

Matthew 10:34-42

Finally, in our Gospel reading, we read a continuation of Jesus' discussion of persecution. He begins with a sobering statement that the result of His ministry and our evangelism in His name will be division even within our own families. Peace will follow eventually, but right now we are living in a sinful world that will reject Christ and His words. Until Christ comes again to make all things new we will need to live through the sword while we await the peace that only He can bring.

Because we will face opposition, Jesus tells His disciples that all who follow Him will face a choice: will they love the things of this world, or will they love Jesus more? He points out specifically love for family, love for our own comfort, and love for our lives in verses 37-39. In all of these cases, we are to choose to follow Christ so that He will give us eternal life and joy without end.

And finally, Jesus ends His message on a note of hope. He says that any who welcome His disciples will welcome Him – that is Jesus will be with them always and we are being given the status of being His ambassadors to the world. The words we speak are to be Jesus' Words. And those who receive the message of Christ will receive not just the reward of that message, but they will receive the reward of the one telling the message. Christ's grace is so superabundant that it will overflow out of us and into the lives of those around us – those who receive the message we have about our Lord Jesus Christ.

A Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, times of difficulty and persecution will come, although we desire peace and security. Grant that as we face the difficulties of this life, we may continue to show our love for you, to the end that we may be found worthy by being raised to new life with You, for it is in Your name that we pray. Amen.