

OPENING COLLECT

Almighty God, you have broken the tyranny of sin and have sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts whereby we call you Father: give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service, that we and all creation may be brought to the glorious liberty of the children of God; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 28.5-9

5 The prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD; 6 and the prophet Jeremiah said, 'Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD fulfil the words that you have prophesied, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the LORD, and all the exiles. 7 But listen now to this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. 8 The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. 9 As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet.'

Our Gospel passage is the end of Matthew's account of the Mission of the Twelve, where Jesus talks to the disciples about their reception by the people. So, appropriately, our linked passage, from the Scriptures, comes from Jeremiah, from whom, as last week, we learn a great deal about how he was received as a prophet! Prophets are not predictors, they are messengers: they speak 'on behalf of' someone. That is what the Greek pro-phemi means. But there is a problem, especially if those who also see themselves as prophets (and Hananiah certainly did) do not agree with what you say, and the crowd prefers to listen to them. However, we can say this. If they speak on behalf of God, then it is unlikely that they will say what the people want to hear, and more likely that they will say what the people need to hear! This may not be popular, as Jeremiah found, but it is an important lesson for us.

SECOND READING: Romans 6.12-23

12 Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 13 No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. 15 What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted 18 and that you, having been set free from sin,

Paul is concerned with the quality of life in the young churches he has founded on his missionary journeys. Christ has made a difference (last week's reading) he says and your way of life should have changed.. Now, he brings his teaching home, like any good teacher, with apt illustrations, often drawn from the Scriptures (using Abraham, for example, in Chapter 4) or, as here, from life. You may recall Jesus saying that it is not possible to serve two masters, God and Mammon (Lk.16.13/Matt.6.24). So, here, Paul using the idea of slavery, which they knew and experienced, challenges them to be either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness. They must not waver between the two. They are to serve God wholly.

Epistle continued: have become slaves of righteousness.

19 I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. 20 When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If they do, then they may grow in holiness: they may become sanctified. That is to become, in Paul's terms, 'in Christ': it is to walk the way of life eternal, the way of love, the way of Jesus, and so become a useful servant of God.

Gospel: Matthew 10.40-42

Jesus said to the twelve:

40 'Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

41 Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a Prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous;

42 and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.'

As we saw last week, Jesus, in this chapter of Matthew, is sending the Twelve out on mission. They are to preach the Kingdom of Heaven and heal (vv.7-8). But he warns the disciples how they are likely to be received: what it may cost to become spokesmen for God and his Kingdom. Now, Jesus reassures them. Some will hear them, and, however unpopular the message, anyone who does listen will know that you speak for God, and their lives will be changed; they will have their reward. So Jesus challenged the twelve to work for the Kingdom, and now he challenges us! We are to speak for God and challenge all to walk along the way of holiness. But we need to be clear what is being asked of us. The work of the prophet, like the way of holiness, is not a route that shields us from the world. It is a way which involves us in speaking out and touching humanity with the love of God, whatever the effect on us.. All that we do, individually and as a community, should be done in the name of Christ and to the glory of God. The feelings and identity of the person, who acts, or of the community, which acts, is of no real importance. It is difficult though is it not? We all like to be praised and loved, and thanked, and so we are easily tempted to take the easy path! However, walk in love and with faith, and you will receive your reward. The Gospel will be shared and the Kingdom will grow. We would do well to notice the final verse.

Post-Communion Collect:

O God, whose beauty is beyond our imagining and whose power we cannot comprehend: show us your glory as far as we can grasp it, and shield us from knowing more than we can bear until we may look upon you without fear; through Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen.**