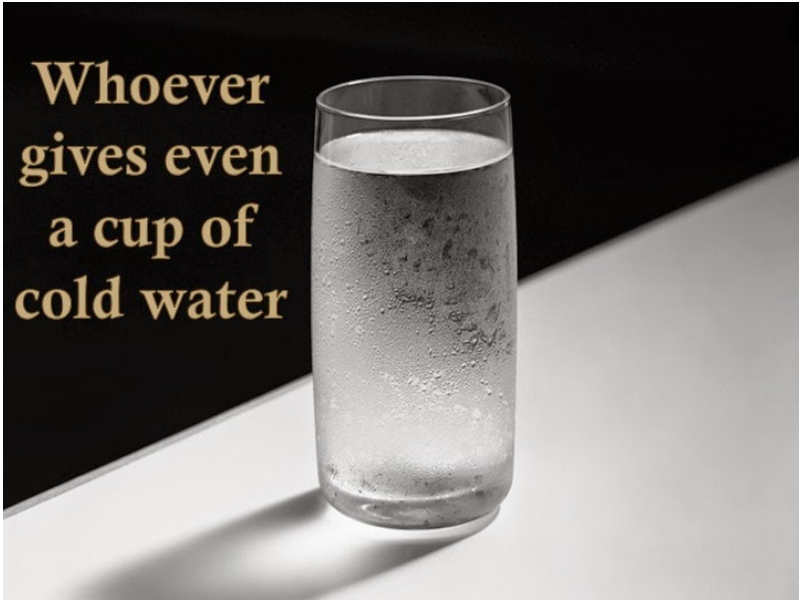


ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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WELCOME THE PROPHET

The Rev. Andrew F. Kline

Text of a Sermon preached on the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

June 28, 2020

JEREMIAH 28:5-9 | PSALM 89:1-4, 15-18

ROMANS 6:12-23 | MATTHEW 10:40-42

The scene is the daily nationally televised press conference. There are no cameras of course, but all the town and tribal elders are gathered in the courtyard just in front of the Temple steps, at the center of the great city of David. Just steps away, through the Great Hall, stands the smaller room, the Holy of Holies, containing the Ark of the Covenant on the Mercy Seat. It is a scene of desolation.

Three years ago it was violated by the Babylonian army, and stripped bare of all the all the Treasures of Solomon. They, along with King Jehoiakin, were marched unceremoniously off to Babylon.

Not normal. No new normal.

Cousin Zedekiah is presiding at the announcement. He has been installed by Nebuchadnezzar II as King Regent, or temporary ruler, while Nebuchadnezzar considers how to leverage this human and physical capital to more permanent ends.

Zedekiah, emboldened by his counselor Hananiah, the court prophet, declares: “Make Israel great again! And all will be well. We are on our way to a full recovery. Besides, the throne of David will last forever!”

Hananiah takes questions. Most gathered don't seem to want to argue with the court ideology, the temple theology. After all, the massive monument of Solomon still stands. And Babylon is so very far away. Not too long ago it was the bad trade deals with the Egyptians we were worried about. Look, now they are our friends. Don't worry. Israel is open for business!

And then the crowd turns to see a man coming slowly up the steps, carrying an incredible load. What is that on his neck? A Yoke! Of course. It is that crazy prophet Jeremiah. That bearer of bad tidings, who is always talking about the covenant that God made with us and that we have broken.

Remember when he was talking about the Egyptians and he said “Woe unto them who say “Peace, peace, when there is no peace?” And look, they have sworn to help us now. We don't need anyone else. We can take back control!

Jeremiah comes toward them all and summarizes what he sees. “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; and the prophet Jeremiah said, “Amen! May the Lord do so; may the Lord fulfill 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. But listen now to this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. 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.””

Jeremiah is pointing out that the only reality worth considering is a data driven reality. Look at the facts. Not just the ones you want to see. Look at all the facts.

The role of the prophet is to look into the heart of God and the heart of a nation and see if their purposes and motivations line up. God has said so many times before that this Temple will stand and the descendants of David will sit on its throne if and only if they keep his covenant. Look around us. It is easy to see that we have gone after too many idols for far too long. Look around you and see the corruption, the oppression, and violence of those wanting only to maintain their own power.

And besides, look and see the burden the Babylonians have placed on us. It is like this huge wooden yoke around the prophet's neck. They may be thousands of miles away now, but they hold all the cards. Again, we really shouldn't be arguing with a virus. Our enemies may be thousands of miles away now, but they will be back. We will regret this little rebellion. It will mean the end of David's house.

Hananiah steps down from the podium. He takes the yoke off Jeremiah's neck and throws it to the ground. "I say there will be victory and peace. Take him away." Jeremiah is punished for speaking the truth the power, but after a while manages to escape to Egypt in all the chaos.

From there he gets his message out to the exiles that they should settle in and settle down for a long stay, build and plant and prepare for a future for yet unseen generation. Seven years later, King Nebuchadnezzar will come back and finish the job and burn the city and the temple to the ground, taking the rest of Israel into Exile for seventy years.

Imagine yourself as a bystander at that moment. Perhaps your job is to go report what you saw to your town council. Perhaps your job is to pass the word on to those in exile about what was going on back home. There are moments in the life of a family and a nation that feel different. There are moments when you know that basic principles are at stake. At these moments the foundations are shaking and it is important to know what they are and how they might fall.

To be a Christian is to be part of a global family that transcends every tribe and every nation. To be a Christian is to be sent out to love and serve every tribe and every nation by proclaiming that there is a greater kingdom, a greater loyalty, than our worldly concerns.

To be a Christian is to welcome the prophets and listen to them, especially when they point us back to our fundamental kingdom mission.

When Jesus appeared to reestablish David's rule on a cross, he made sure to teach his followers that they should always be about announcing the presence of the kingdom and sharing its reality, its concrete love. He sent them door to door. He sent them prepared to listen to the real problems of real people. He made them the hands and feet of his healing and reconciling power.

In our baptism, this mission becomes part of our DNA. Everyone has a role, from prophet on down to the newest disciple. Let us hear this again in our gospel lesson this morning.

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 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; 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."

This morning, as we face an ongoing pandemic and social unrest that none of us can wish away. It is freeing, I think, even if we were king or president, to not have to make a good show of things. It is freeing to see the reality we really face. It is freeing to repent of past sins, change our thinking – wear a mask! – and widen our hearts to the people we need to love in order to heal ourselves and our communities – of racism, of greed, of fear, of violence - of every sin that weighs us down. We must not grow weary in well doing!

Welcome the prophets! Listen to the righteous person. And be that disciple that is a source of a glass of cold refreshing water to the souls around you. It may seem at times too little or too risky but it is what gives us life. Though we may never see the result, this work is our reward.