

06.07.26 ~ Pentecost 2 & Communion Sunday

“Welcome All Who Are Grafted In”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Words of Judgment

Pew Bible 665

Jeremiah 17:5-10, 14 ^{NIV}

⁵ This is what the Lord says:

“Cursed is the one who trusts in man,
who draws strength from mere flesh
and whose heart turns away from the Lord.

⁶ That person will be like a bush in the wastelands;
they will not see prosperity when it comes.

They will dwell in the parched places of the desert,
in a salt land where no one lives.

⁷ “But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,
whose confidence is in him.

⁸ They will be like a tree planted by the water
that sends out its roots by the stream.

It does not fear when heat comes;
its leaves are always green.

It has no worries in a year of drought
and never fails to bear fruit.”

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things
and beyond cure.

Who can understand it?

¹⁰ “I the Lord search the heart
and examine the mind,

to reward each person according to their conduct,
according to what their deeds deserve.”

¹⁴ Heal me, Lord, and I will be healed;
save me and I will be saved,
for you are the one I praise.

Leader: These Are Also Words of Assurance!

People: Thanks be to God!

Words of Instruction

Romans 11:11-13, 17-24 ^{NLT}

Pew Bible 986

¹¹ Did God’s people stumble and fall beyond recovery? Of course not! They were disobedient, so God made salvation available to the Gentiles. But he wanted his own people to become jealous and claim it for themselves. ¹² Now if the Gentiles were enriched because the people of Israel turned down God’s offer of salvation, think how much greater a blessing the world will share when they finally accept it.

¹³ I am saying all this especially for you Gentiles. God has appointed me as the apostle to the Gentiles. I stress this . . .

¹⁷ But some of these branches from Abraham's tree—some of the people of Israel—have been broken off. And you Gentiles, who were branches from a wild olive tree, have been grafted in. So now you also receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children, sharing in the rich nourishment from the root of God's special olive tree. ¹⁸ But you must not brag about being grafted in to replace the branches that were broken off. You are just a branch, not the root.

¹⁹ "Well," you may say, "those branches were broken off to make room for me." ²⁰ Yes but remember—those branches were broken off because they didn't believe in Christ, and you are there because you do believe. So don't think highly of yourself, but fear what could happen. ²¹ For if God did not spare the original branches, he won't spare you either.

²² Notice how God is both kind and severe. He is severe toward those who disobeyed, but kind to you if you continue to trust in his kindness. But if you stop trusting, you also will be cut off. ²³ And if the people of Israel turn from their unbelief, they will be grafted in again, for God has the power to graft them back into the tree. ²⁴ You, by nature, were a branch cut from a wild olive tree. So if God was willing to do something contrary to nature by grafting you into his cultivated tree, he will be far more eager to graft the original branches back into the tree where they belong.

Leader: These Are Apostle Paul's Words to Guide Us!

People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Oh Lord, we worship and adore you, yet also sometimes fear your judgment and wrath. Help us to balance our fear with faith, love, and assurance. Thank you for the insights that Jeremiah and Apostle Paul share in your Scriptures. We too are grafted in to the family of God and Christ by our baptism. Help us to understand that better. We feel your assurance when we see the natural grafted branches on tree trunks and when those take hold and bear fruit. We feel your strength knowing our roots are divine and secure in the generations of Abraham. We love you, Lord, and long to be in your presence. Help us to open our minds and hearts to trust what we do not understand. Please speak through these Scriptures, this message, and messenger. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Last week, we recognized Trinity Sunday, celebrating the triune God, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit, three in one. That serves us well as we read Jeremiah's assurance and prophecy while also hearing the apostle Paul's explanation of how the Gentile believers are grafted in to the roots of the Jewish faith, and members who supported, rejected, and

crucified Jesus. It is a complicated yet sanctifying situation that baffles some believers, especially those of early Christian history. The congregational hymn we sang explains it well, so keep those lyrics from your bulletin insert to ponder this week as I recommend you also go back and read Romans Chapters 9-12. Today's message is just a glance at Romans, a good book for Bible study.

Our first passage in Jeremiah sets the stage, so to speak. By way of context, Judah had been turning to false gods and outside alliances for protection. Through this poetic prophecy, almost a psalm of lament, God speaks through Jeremiah that he has cursed them from turning away from him. They are believing in humankind's efforts for everything rather than depending on their faith in God's provision and care. This angers God, and he warns they will become parched, withered, and unfruitful, as dead as the salt lands around the Dead Sea. We studied a similar prophecy for the people from Isaiah last May 18, in my sermon called "parched." You may recall the bulletin image of a desert with cracks in the sandy soil.

In this passage, a righteous person, however, will not be like the described withered bush or shrub in the desert but rather will thrive like a tree planted by water. The curses and drought crises may come but the person in the passage (or the tree in the metaphor) will thrive and flourish but not fear negative outcomes. That righteous person will depend on God not humans to nourish and supply his needs. Jeremiah laments his own belief as he taught many who waivered in theirs, persecuted him and yet still tried to serve God. It is these and himself he is judging.

These stalwart trees (Jews and descendants of Abraham, if you will) are the root of Jesse when we read of Christ's lineage--the people of

Abraham and the root into which Paul's new believing Gentiles are grafted. In Romans 9-12, the apostle Paul articulates how Israel rejected Christ and therefore rebels against God. Paul is telling his Jewish audience that they missed the Messiah and the message of grace over works. This was a temporary stumbling of sin, not a permanent falling from grace, much like Paul's own testimony and history of sinful actions persecuting Christ followers. Paul was hoping to bring some Jews into belief in Jesus to receive both old and new blessing. And he also speaks to the Gentiles, justifying his credentials and explaining how some branches are broken off (unbelievers) yet others can be grafted back onto the strong, stable trunk of Abraham's lineage.

It is time now for a lesson on grafting, an expert-level part of gardening. A tree farmer must do a graft correctly and carefully to get the best of both tree varieties. One of the two trees has quality rootstock, and the other produces more delicate or fragile branches, leaves, or fruit. That delicate species needs something stronger to support it physically or nutritionally, like the dwarf Red Dragon lace leaf Japanese maple at my home. I remember purchasing it with Lee Ann many years ago from the nursery and it was more expensive because it had a unique appearance. The trunk was sturdy with beautiful angular shapes, yet the branches and leaves on it were delicate red and lacy. When I asked for a "grafting" tutorial from her this week, she used our tree as an example. Prior to our purchase, this cultivar (only one of thousands) was created under special conditions. That pendulum branching and leaf delicacy required a hardier trunk for survival and landscape design as a mounding, center garden tree in our region. Basically, grafting is a form of propagation; a stem of the

desired tree (the scion) is cut and placed into a slit in the trunk touching the cambium, then covered with soil, grafting tape like the photo on the bulletin cover, burlap, or plastic and left in a greenhouse to grow together while retaining the best qualities of each.

In Paul's example, wild olive root stock is hardy but does not produce edible fruit for eating or olive oil production, so typically the cultivated trees are grafted onto the wild ones. Manufacturers must grow cultivated olives on the sturdy root stock of the wild olive tree. We and the Gentiles Paul speaks of are the branches and fruit of Jesus' evangelism yet are fragile and must be grown on or have been a part of a stronger root stock. The grafting process entitles them and us to be heirs to God's promises to the Jews (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob of the Old Testament). It does not make the Gentiles or us Jewish because like the graft they maintain their separate qualities and character while producing new fruit.

Paul's example is reversed to make a point they could understand. They were grafted in as a branch of a wild olive into a good olive, which is contrary to the way and custom of the husbandman, who grafts the good olive into the bad; but those that God grafts into the church he finds wild and barren, and good for nothing. Men graft to mend the tree; but God grafts to mend the branch. The Gentiles who have been added are not to be arrogant in their status. This is crucial that God desires the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles. God's promises are unchangeable and he will honor his promises to both his people and others saved through Jesus.

It is our privilege to be grafted in through our baptism and salvation. It is that fact that we celebrate in today's communion. Now let us share the remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice for our benefit and then go on to share our faith with others! "14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Amen. ||

Please pray with me: We praise you Lord reading and teaching your word, trying to understand these difficult concepts. We trust that you will enlighten us and educate us so that we may be good examples to others. We thank you for your presence in our fellowship today. Accept our gratitude for the grafting and your acceptance. Help us to praise and glorify you in all we do, think, or say. Deepen our faith and strengthen our resolve to follow your teachings, inviting others to love you as we do. May our lives be acceptable to you. Please bless these elements as we remember your resurrection. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.