



OUR FAITH JOURNEY INVOLVES MANY CHOICES

Our conversations are often dotted with expressions like "apples and oranges" or "black and white." Our Scriptures today refer to a number of such contrasts and opposites. They speak of "cursed and blessed," "now and then," "this life and the next life."

Jeremiah speaks for the Lord and relates some opposites. Jeremiah points out that the person who does not trust in the Lord but rather trusts in his or her own strength or in other people is cursed while the person who trusts in the Lord is blessed. He gives the example of a barren bush in the dry and lifeless desert being like the person who does not trust in the Lord, while it is the fruit-bearing tree (that always has plenty of water) that resembles the person "who trusts in God and whose hope is in the LORD."

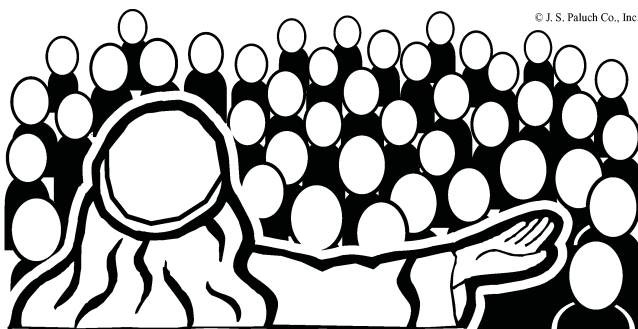
In the Gospel Jesus points out contrasts and opposites in the Beatitudes. Speaking to the people on a level stretch of ground after having come down from the mountain, Jesus is in the midst of the people and contrasts for them "now and then," how things are experienced now compared to how things will be then. Jesus uses concrete examples from their own experience of poverty, hunger, sadness. Jesus announces the following contrasts. Though they might now be physically poor, they will eventually be rich in the fullness of God's kingdom. Though they might now be physically hungry, they will eventually enjoy the heavenly banquet. Though they might now weep, they will eventually experience eternal joy. Though they might be hated now, they will eventually leap with joy in heaven.

Jesus makes more contrasts. The rich now have money, but their money will not provide for them in the end. Those who are not physically hungry now will be hungry then. Those who laugh now will then grieve and weep. Those who are (wrongly) praised will suffer the fate of false prophets.

St. Paul challenges the Corinthians to be firm in their belief in the resurrection. Jesus' resurrection is what gives meaning and purpose to this life. "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ," Paul says, "we are the most pitiable people of all." Jesus' resurrection is what gives meaning to the contrasts we find in our lives as we seek to live the gospel.

We are just like the people of the time of Jeremiah and Jesus. We are on our faith journey in this life to the next. It will help to remember: If we trust in others or seek strength in ourselves or turn our hearts away from Christ, we will suffer dire consequences. We will not be blessed. If we trust in Christ and place our hope in him, we will be blessed and find true joy. Now is the time to live the gospel. The then of our lives is being determined by the now of our life on earth. Jesus' resurrection is what gives meaning and purpose to this life. Jesus' resurrection is what gives meaning to the contrasts we find in our lives. Jesus' resurrection is what will cause our own resurrection, our journey from this life to the next.

"Cursed and blessed," "now and then," "this life and the next": These words reflect the contrasts and opposites. How do we see them apply to our lives? What do they mean to us as we walk with Christ? The important thing is to live this life with eyes of faith, always looking with eyes of faith to the next life. Christ strengthens us to live lives of faith, hope and love.



"Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied." -- Luke 6:20-21a