

Planted by Streams

Call to worship: Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked . . . but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season. *Psalm 1:1-3*

Hymn StF 438 Your ceaseless, unexhausted love,

unmerited and free,
delights our evil to remove,
and help our misery.

You wait and you are gracious still
and will with sinners bear,
that, saved, we may your goodness feel,
and all your grace declare.

Your goodness and your truth to me,
to every soul, abound,
a vast, unfathomable sea,
where all our thoughts are drowned.

Its streams the whole creation reach,
so plenteous is the store,
enough for all, enough for each,
enough for evermore.

Faithful, O Lord, your mercies are,
a rock that cannot move;
a thousand promises declare
your constancy of love.

Throughout the universe it reigns,
unalterably sure;
and while the truth of God remains
the goodness must endure.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Prayer You alone, O God, can satisfy our deepest hunger, and protect us from the lure of wealth and power. Teach us to seek your Kingdom above all else that we may know the security and joy of those who put their trust in you: through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen

Reading Jeremiah 17:5- 10 Planted by streams Luke 6:17-26 Blessings and Woe

I have lived in 32 different homes in my life and have been asked, where were you happiest? I find that an impossible question to answer, as in each of the places I have known contentment. It's been the right place at the right time in my life. I've often given talks, about the things I have learnt in each of the different places, lessons that God has taught me through people and situations, some of them painful, some exhilarating.

The two readings talk about the kind of people who are blessed, or to use a modern translation those who are happy. Jeremiah wrote 'But blessed (happy) is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. *Jer 17:7.*

Jesus said 'Blessed (happy) are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Luke 6:20.

These biblical sayings defining happiness differ from our contemporary culture, which promotes a happiness which is self-centred not God centred. To be happy in biblical terms is to entrust one's life to God and his values, It's a result of choosing to live for God.

Jeremiah was prophesying in time when people had turned their back on the Lord, much like our nation today v5. "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the Lord". He is talking about the self-sufficiency, which teaches us to provide for ourselves, the arrogance that we don't need God but can do it ourselves.

Jeremiah says this person is like a bush in a parched landscape struggling to survive. In the Holy land I saw the arid, parched land with weedy plants, that didn't provide shade and barely survived.

Jeremiah contrasts this with those who have learnt to trust in the Lord. This person is like a tree planted by the water, that sends its roots into the stream. It doesn't fear when heat comes, its leaves are always green. It contrasts those who are selfish and do evil, they don't prosper, those who trust God and do good, they prosper.

However we know that sometimes evil people prosper and good people go through many hardships and difficulties.

The Psalmist spoke of travelling through the Valley of Baca, (*Ps 84:6*) or valley of trouble. He talks of transformation, even in those troubles. – the autumn rains covering it with pools, potential new things happening through the troubles. The dry parched earth, overnight turning green and coming alive again.

To trust God, planted by a stream, he says that person has no worries: in a year of drought and they never fail to bear fruit. So why, am I not producing fruit. Jeremiah describes our hearts – they are deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Jeremiah sees the heart as the seat of human affection and uses the heart as a figure for all that is right and wrong with the human will and conduct. From our heart we commit as an act of our will, but also the

heart is permeated with evil, capable of deceiving, even itself. The heart represents all those efforts by individuals to place themselves at the centre of things even as we camouflage our selfishness with false words and deceptive deeds intended to convey **our selflessness**. Such deviousness comes quite naturally. Even as I write these words, my heart is wanting to say, Yes I can see that is true for other people but surely not me. I am sure that I am not alone in hearing a sermon, and applying that to other people, but not to myself. We are generous in giving the sermon away. Jeremiah got used to people not taking his message seriously, they might see that it applies to other people, but their hearts had deceived them that they weren't that bad. Jeremiah asks the question who can understand the heart and God replies, "I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind – and He rewards us accordingly to our conduct and deeds. Paul echoed something similar when he said "I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing" (Rom 7:19)

Paul concludes "Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" He goes on to answer the question himself "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord".

In the gospel reading, Luke has a shorter version of the beatitudes, followed by a contrasting list of woes. Jesus is teaching that Kingdom values are different to worldly values. It was counter cultural then as it is now. It is the poor, the hungry, those who weep and those who are hated who are blessed. This must have shocked the hearers. For it is the rich, the full, those who laugh and those of whom people speak well, who are in receipt of God's displeasure – reversing the cultural norm. The underlying qualities of people in these categories is selfishness, greed and lack of concern for others, and they grow when we are not rooted in a relationship with Jesus.

We return to the picture of a tree planted near the stream. Because there is water the tree is green and fruit grows. Paul often prays for people to be rooted in God. And I pray that you, being **rooted** and established in love, may have power together with all God's people to grasp, how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ Eph 3:17. It is then, that the fruit of the spirit will grow in us and we will be blessed as we trust in the Lord.

For your reflection.

- 1) Have you made a choice to serve Jesus and is your life rooted in Jesus and his word?
- 2) Are you bearing fruit? Don't give this question to others! Remember many religious people in Jesus's time and Jeremiah time gave the question away and didn't apply it to themselves. May God help us to respond.

Prayers

Father God, forgive us for all too often we live carelessly, having little thought for you or for others.

As we would be done by, so may we do in turn

We speak without thinking, act with little thought of the consequences, and the n wonder why our mistakes return to haunt us

As we would be done by, so may we do in turn

Hymn StF 728 O God, you search me and you know me.

All my thoughts lie open to your gaze.
When I walk or lie down you are before me:
ever the maker and keeper of my days.

You know my resting and my rising.
You discern my purpose from afar,
and with love everlasting you besiege me:
in every moment of life or death, you are.

Before a word is on my tongue, Lord,
you have known its meaning through and through

Instead of joy we bring sorrow, instead of harmony, discord: Instead of help, hinderance, instead of encouragement, dismay.

As we would be done by, so may we do in turn

Teach us that we reap what we sow, for good or ill, and so in everything we do, help us to be more caring, more considerate, more supportive, more wise, so that the harvest of our lives may be pleasing to you

As we would be done by, so may we do in turn. Amen.

You are with me beyond my understanding:
God of my present, my past and future, too.

Although your Spirit is upon me,
still I search for shelter from your light.
There is nowhere on earth I can escape you:
even the darkness is radiant in your sight.

For you created me and shaped me,
gave me life within my mother's womb.
For the wonder of who I am, I praise you:
safe in your hands, all creation is made new.

Bernadette Farrell (b. 1957) based on psalm 139

Blessing Father God, thank you for your call on our lives, thank you that you plant us by the stream of your grace and love. May you grow wonderful fruit in our lives, to your praise and glory. The Blessing of Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon you this day and for all eternity. Amen