

## **EPIPHANY: IN FAITH WE PROCLAIM GOD'S LOVE FOR ALL PEOPLE**

**Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany**

**February 11, 2007**

**Proper 1**

**Jeremiah 17:5-10**

**Psalm 1**

**1 Corinthians 15:12-20**

**Luke 6:17-26**

### **Trusting in a World Turned Upside-Down**

The readings from Jeremiah and from Luke's Gospel have much to say about trust. The readings have even more to say about what we are to trust. But, as is often the case with the Bible, the words surprise and challenge us.

Begin by reading Jesus' words in Luke 6:24-26. If we paraphrase these words slightly in order to give them a colloquial feel, we might read: "Bad news for you people who trust in your wealth, your satisfactions, your happiness, and your good reputations. One day, you'll wake up, and it will all be gone." These words get our attention, don't they!

Now paraphrase Jesus' earlier words in verses 20-23: "All will be well for you people who are poor, hungry, sad, hated, and chastised. You may think you have nothing to trust in now, but great things are in store for you someday!"

These words are not what we would expect—or even want—to hear from Jesus. It is as if Jesus has turned the expectations of the world upside-down. Our commitment to God seems to depend not on trusting in the fullness of the world, but on trusting in its emptiness. With our attention focused on only getting and keeping the "good" things of the world—like wealth and happiness and reputations—we can become distracted from seeing what is most important. But what is it that is so much more important than financial security and well-deserved happiness?

Perhaps reading again the words of the prophet Jeremiah can help here: Don't trust in humans and the ways of humans; trust in the LORD (Jeremiah 17:5,7). When we trust in humans, says Jeremiah, we will have no real security and will be open to great losses (17:6). But when we trust in the LORD, we remain strong and hearty and abundant (17:8).

In a world that wants us to focus on the temporary fixes of quick wealth, military might, up-sizing, and celebrity-like prestige, the words of Jesus break in and turn such expectations on their head. Realize that the gift of God's Kingdom, Jesus says, is not about the acquisition of things, but about living out our calling as his disciples in a world that is more about hurting than about happiness, more about just getting by than about wealth, and more about inequality than about

“justice for all.” Jesus calls us to serve him by doing our best to help those who suffer at the hands of unjust leaders, unfair policies, and unkind “neighbors.”

On the one hand, we can celebrate in knowing that we don’t need to “buy” our way into God’s Kingdom. But on the other hand, we are reminded and challenged that we need to be about trusting in God and God’s ways to be a part of that Kingdom...and not about trusting in the world, its false securities, and empty promises for happiness. Trust in the LORD. Work to bring about the Kingdom. In so doing, let us do our part to turn the world upside-down. And may we be blessed as we do.

This week’s Reflection was prepared by Steve Berneking, Ph.D., who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Senior Manager in the Translation Unit of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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**This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Gulf States**

**(Mideast)** – With thanks to God for the Year of the Family 2006 campaign which emphasized the importance of the Christian family in today’s world, and with thanks to God that three new Bible outlets were inaugurated in 2005 and 2006, providing better facilities and access to the Scriptures, and with prayers for the development of Bible Society work in Qatar and for the Arabic Scripture program; **Iraq** – With prayers for peace in that nation and for the Bible Society team, with thanks to God for the miraculous work in difficult circumstances and for the steady growth in demand for Scriptures, and with prayers for the Kurdistan region, for Bible work there and for the opening of a new Bible Society branch in Erbil, and with prayers for the new shop in Mosul operated in collaboration with the sisters of the Chaldean Catholic order; **Syria** – With thanks to God for the freedom to distribute God’s Word and for the joy expressed by those who receive it, and with prayers for the completion of the new Christian Resource Center in Damascus which will contain Christian literature and multimedia materials.

**Activity Corner:** “Leaves of Happiness”

Supplies needed: Bible; construction paper (assorted colors); pens or pencils; scissors; patterns in the shape of leaves; bowl or basket.

Read together Psalm 1. Discuss what the psalm says about true happiness. Invite everyone to trace and cut out a leaf. On one side of the leaf, ask everyone to write “True Happiness,” and on the other side, encourage each one to write what they have learned from Psalm 1 (either in their own words, or by copying key passages from the psalm). Gather the leaves into a basket or bowl and incorporate each one’s thoughts into a closing prayer of thanksgiving.