

What A Difference It Makes!

Jeremiah 17:5-8

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Today's epistle gives us the opportunity to observe Easter in winter. Indeed every Sunday we gather to celebrate the resurrection and what a difference it makes in our world and our lives.

The epistle lessons have been working their way through 1 Corinthians. Many times it is hard to find a connection between the three lessons. But today there is a clear connection as we use the theme, "What a difference it makes."

We live in a world that basically says it doesn't make any difference what you believe. The world says it doesn't make any difference what you watch or what you read. It doesn't make any difference what you do. Today's lessons make clear that nothing could be further from the truth.

The Old Testament lesson makes clear that it makes an enormous difference where someone or something is planted or rooted. The epistle makes clear that it makes an enormous difference if Christ has been raised. And the Gospel says that there are those who are blessed and those to whom God says, "Woe." That is an enormous difference.

The Old Testament lesson starts with the words: Cursed. It is the same word that appears in Genesis 3 when God curses the serpent.

The title over this chapter in my Bible is, "The sins of Judah." V. 5 makes clear that it is God Who pronounces both the curse and the blessing.

God says, "Cursed is the one who trusts in man." The Lord pronounces a curse on those who put their trust in human beings. Even Israel turned away. They turned to Egypt, to chariots, to horsemen rather than to the Holy One of Israel.

Then God says, 'Cursed is the one who finds his strength in his flesh.'

Have you done any DIY (Do it yourself) projects lately? You can just turn on the TV, listen on the radio or go to YouTube and learn how to tile a floor, repair your washing machine, file your own taxes, etc.

When my wife and I tackle do it yourself projects things don't go very smoothly. There are certainly people more than talented than we are.

People do it yourself projects to save money. It gives them personal satisfaction and it meets the need of being fiercely independent.

We even say God helps those who help themselves. But God never said that. It started with Aesop's fables and made it into the writings of Benjamin Franklin.

There are even people who say, "I'll be back to church when I get my life back together." And God said, "Cursed is the one who finds strength in his own flesh."

Based on their own strength how much hope did Moses and the children of Israel have at the Red Sea? How much hope did Gideon have with 300 men against the Midianites?

Then the text says, "Cursed is one who turns away from the Lord." God's people in the days of the Judges would turn from the Lord and then cry out to Him. He would raise up a Judge or a Savior to deliver them. They would sing and celebrate. Then they would turn away from the Lord all over again. People tend to treat God that way. They turn to Him when they need Him but when things are going well they turn away.

Let me make clear that these sins were not only committed by Judah. We too trust in humans, trust in ourselves and turn away from God.

The result according to our text is that we are like a shrub in the desert

that won't see any good come. He will dwell in the parched places of the wilderness.

It does make a difference whom you trust and where you are planted.

There is a saying that says, "Hope springs eternal". This text makes clear that is not true when you trust in man. So where do you turn when your hope runs dry? Is there hope when hope is taken away? Is there hope when the situation is hopeless?

The text says: Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose hope is in the Lord. Relying on God the text says: He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."

A TV program, back in 1998, featured blind skiers doing the slalom. They were obviously paired with sighted skiers who shouted to them right, left. As they obeyed the commands they were able to negotiate the course and cross the finish line. It was either trust or complete catastrophe.

What a vivid picture of the Christian life in this world. We must rest solely on the Word of the only One Who is truly sighted." (*Illustrations of Preaching & Teaching p. 210 Larson*)

The truth is God doesn't help those who help themselves. God helps the helpless. God is our Refuge and Strength. My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Jesus came into the desert and death of our world to give us hope. He did that by carrying our sins, bearing our punishment and dying our death. He was put to death for our transgressions and raised for our justification.

Hope springs eternal from an empty tomb. The difference between a risen Christ and a dead Christ can't be any clearer than the way it is spelled out on 1 Corinthians 15.

If Christ has not been raised our preaching is in vain. If Christ has not

been raised your faith is futile. If Christ has not been raised you are still in your sins. If Christ has not been raised then there is no resurrection. **But Christ has indeed been raised the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.**

I don't know if it can be said any better than Luther says it. He is writing about the woman at the well in John 4. "Whoever wishes to be safeguarded from the devil's might and to escape sin and death must draw from this well, Christ; from Him flows all salvation and eternal bliss. This fountain is inexhaustible; it is full of grace and truth before

God; it never fails no matter how much we draw from it. Even if we all dip from it without stopping, it cannot be emptied, but it remains a perennial fount of all grace and truth; an unfathomable well, an eternal fountain. The more we draw from it, the more it gives. Such water, as St. John remarks later, wells up to eternal life." (Treasury of Daily Prayer p. 1200)

Let me be clear the roots need to be established before the drought comes. When you are rooted in the Word and in the empty tomb you are rooted in a well that never runs dry. That is why, Baptism the Word and the Lord's Supper are so important. There we are connected to the death and resurrection of Christ. There we put our roots down in the living water that wells up into eternal life.

The text says you don't have to fear the heat, your leaves will always remain green and you will never cease to bear fruit.

That my friends is the difference a risen Christ makes. Jesus Christ is risen, we are reconciled to God, we are justified, we are redeemed, we have eternal life, we are saved. Christ has been raised. Your faith is certain. Your sins are forgiven. Those who died in Christ are saved. Christ has been raised and we have hope for this life and the life to come.

What a difference God's strength and provision make. Amen.