

BLESSED BY TRUST

Jeremiah 17. 5-10

1 Corinthians 15. 12-20

Luke 6. 17-26

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

About five years ago, some of you may remember that there was a problem of falling trees in Saumarez Park. Amongst the trees that were falling were the Turkey oaks, those magnificent trees that were initially grown in south-eastern France before being introduced to the UK in the 18th century. Turkey oaks can grow as tall as 30 metres high; and they produce acorns that are quite distinctive in appearance, with orange bases.

The Environment Department in Guernsey was concerned about the falling oaks and conducted an investigation. It turns out that the trees fell after a series of heavy storms, which themselves occurred after unprecedented levels of rainfall during the autumn and winter periods. Samples of roots were taken from three separate Turkey oaks to the 'Plant Clinic' at Burnt Lane, in order to check for disease. Although some of the roots were blackened, no disease was found. This suggests that waterlogged soil was the main cause. Waterlogged soils lose structure and adhesion; and this increases the risk of trees blowing over in stormy conditions.

Generally, trees are generally very adaptable; and some species can cope with fairly long periods of water-logging. I think that these same species must be the ones that are referred to in our appointed text from Jeremiah. The passage compares a shrub in the desert to a tree that has been planted by the water. Those who rely on the flesh and 'whose hearts turn away from the Lord' are cursed with a life that resembles the shrub, which has no way to grow or thrive, and finds itself alone in the parched places of the wilderness. But those who 'trust in the Lord', and 'whose trust *is* the

Lord', are blessed like the tree: the tree does not fear when the heat comes; its leaves stay green; and it is perpetually fruit-bearing. Trusting in the Lord, says Jeremiah, is *life-giving*.

Jeremiah the prophet preached to Israel around 600 BC. It was during some of the nation's most critical times, including the destruction of Jerusalem, Judah, the temple and the period of exile. There were many political upheavals in the Near East and the nations were in conflict with one another. Assyria was declining; and Egypt and Babylon were each trying to dominate the Fertile Crescent. There were many fierce battles and many great cities fell.

At the same time it was a brief period of reform, as Josiah (who was the king of Judah) tried to restore orthodox faith. The reform removed some of the pagan cults and practices that had dominated Jewish society. Unfortunately, many people resisted the reform; and they continued to believe in other gods. Jeremiah was the prophet of the times who warned his people against abandoning their faith and not trusting in God to be with them.

In Jeremiah's day, the people of Israel were dependent on schemes, deals, compromises and alliances, especially in the political arena. They survived with connections, contracts, and lots of 'insider' information. But these provided them with a false sense of security. They were all man-made arrangements. Jeremiah warned them that the deals they thought would give them *life* would only be for the short-term. Indeed, the people were misled and put their trust in practices that ultimately led to their demise.

'Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord', Jeremiah said. We do well to give particular attention to the words, 'Whose trust is the Lord'. Trust means to have confidence in; to have hope in; or to believe in. But to trust also means to depend on God and to not fear the outcome.

Jeremiah was preaching to anyone who would listen. Those who took his words to heart made sure that their lives had well-watered roots. Similarly, those of us today who hear Jeremiah's message must ask ourselves, 'Are my roots well-watered?' Or to put it another way, '*In what, or in whom, is my trust?*' If our trust is in the Lord, we will be like the tree planted beside the water. We will not fear the heat or the drought. We will be able to withstand the storms of life, which will inevitably come. Yes, even those who are blessed by God have to endure storms.

But when those storms come, some of us might be tempted to ask ourselves, 'have they come because my trust and my faith are not enough?' The answer is 'No', and I'll explain why.

In today's gospel reading, our Lord preaches the Beatitudes in his Sermon on the Plain. And for each *present* reality—poverty, hunger, weeping and hatred—Jesus offers a promise that is *to come*. The poor will reap the kingdom; the hungry will be filled; the ones who weep will laugh; and the ones who are excluded will leap for joy. There is no indication that the present painful reality is magically lifted away, even for those who are in Christ's presence and hear his words the moment he speaks them. The promised gifts of life and joy will come; but not necessarily today.

It is this future that Jeremiah paints, too. The green, fruit-bearing tree shall be our hope and future. That tree shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green. Even in darkness and drought, the tree shall grow. Even when everything around it tries to take away its life, the tree shall not die. In the Lord's care, the tree will live.

The future is perhaps a difficult place in which to put our trust. So is the present. And the past just gives us many reasons not to trust in the present or future. These words from our Lord and Jeremiah remind us that it is not the future itself in which

we trust; it is in God. We do not trust in ourselves. We trust in the God who blesses us through our troubled present and leads us to the other side, to a future of hope.

In difficult times, we find our hope in the promises of God, the one who alone holds the past, present, and the future; the one who intimately knows the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the hated, the excluded, the defamed. We find our hope in the God who keeps his promises, and who has so much more in store for us than the current difficulties we may face. For every situation and circumstance of life, there is another angle to it that our God holds before us; ensuring that we do not forget his presence and his power, which are with us now, and which are infused through everything we live.

God's promise is that there is always another experience that awaits us. There is always a reason to hope; *and he is that reason*. It may still be winter; but spring is on the way.

Amen.