

“Where Are You Planted?”
 Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 7:1-17
 Rev. David Hutchinson
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According to the Prophet Jeremiah, it matters where you're planted.

If you are a plant - - located in the desert - - or on a salt flat - - you're in bad shape!

But - - if you are planted by a stream of water - - you can make it through even a drought.

This is fairly sound agricultural advice.

But Jeremiah was NOT an agricultural scientist, nor a gardener.

He was a prophet.

And according to Jeremiah - - his advice about plants - - is really all about TRUST.

IF you trust in God - - you are like a plant located by water - - you will survive.

There WILL be drought - - but you will survive.

It matters where you are planted - - where you are located.

The question for US - - is about who we trust.

Does our trust lead to - - survival?

Or to - - withering away in the dust?

AND - - are we located - - in a safe place - - socially and religiously speaking?

Let me try to put a contemporary spin on this - - and see if I can unpack - - Jeremiah's metaphor a bit. / There are TWO questions:

WHERE are we located?

AND - - WHO do we TRUST?

I'll start with an example...

At the end of January, CBS News ran a story about a man in Kansas.

Your TRUST for him - might shift - depending on how I describe his SOCIAL location.

SO do you trust him?

He is a FELON - - convicted of selling DRUGS.

AND - - he is the Mayor of Levanworth, Kansas.

His name is Jermaine Wilson.

He WAS planted - - in a life that led to crime - - and prison for selling drugs.

But NOW he is - - rehabilitated - - and out of jail - - and has been elected Mayor.

Sometimes - - you can TRANSPLANT yourself - - it seems.

But I'm pretty sure - - it's not easy - - to do.

As evidence that it is not easy - - there is an internet service called:

ReputationDefender.com

It provides reputation analysis for people wondering what happens if someone Google searches them - - or their business. / Ever Google yourself?

Well - - apparently - - sometimes there's a lot of false stuff out there.

But just because you never DID it - - doesn't mean it can't destroy your reputation.

Enter - - ReputationDefender.com

Sometimes - - no matter WHERE we are planted - - socially - - or economically - - things go against us. / And the point is - - it is difficult to overcome - - BAD public opinion.

Well - - BAD public opinion - - is part of what faced this widow in Luke's Gospel reading in chapter 7 - - what we read this morning. / The reading has TWO parts:

The Centurion's part - - and the widow's part.

The Centurion was a Roman citizen with a sick slave.

He had a GOOD reputation.

He was planted - - in a GOOD place.

The Centurion was socially situated - - HIGHER up - - than the widow.

And because of his - - CONNECTIONS - - his slave - - did not die.

The Centurion sent ELDERS to meet Jesus.

Then the Centurion sent FRIENDS from his house to meet Jesus.

And so Jesus heard about it - - and the slave was healed - - before he died.

The WIDOW - - on the other hand - - had a son who had died.

She was socially situated at the bottom of the ladder.

Just because she was a widow - - she had a bad reputation.

But there was no ReputationDefender.com in those days!

So - - her son died - - partly - - because she had no resources.

Yes - - in the story - - Jesus brought the son back to LIFE.

But that required a bit MORE - - than just a healing - - I would imagine.

Jesus - - had compassion for BOTH the Roman soldier - - and - - the widow.

Jesus - - disregards - - their social situation.

Even though - - the soldier is planted by a nice stream - - and the widow lived her life in a social desert - - nevertheless - - Jesus had compassion on each one of them.

Does this mean that Jesus - - overturns Jeremiah's word?

I don't think so.

Because remember - - Jeremiah was talking about TRUST - - not social location.

BOTH - - the widow - - and the soldier - - TRUSTED Jesus.

And their trust - - was like water - - to a plant.

In spite of the challenges the widow faced - she trusted in Jesus - and he had compassion.

And the Centurion soldier - - was a bit unique among Romans - - in trusting Jesus.

The soldier's slave was not healed - - BECAUSE he was well connected - - but because he trusted Jesus. / which many Romans did not.

So the question for us is - - how do we make the BEST - - of where WE are planted?

How can we trust God - - in OUR situation?

The band Spearhead wrote a song called: "Hole in the Bucket" that helps me think more about this question... I'll do a condensed version - - and I won't sing it as a rap song.

It is about an encounter with a beggar on the street.

It goes - - something like this:

"I work 9 to 5 - - but it starts in the PM

And I love the sunrise - - so I step into the AM.

The street is black and shiny from the early nightly rainin'...

The glory of the light - - brings evaporation.

Walk into a store because I need a few items

Sun heats up my blood like a hit of vitamins.

I need to buy some food - - and shampoo for my dreads

And I can't remember why - - but I need a spool of thread.

A man with dirty hands steps around the corner

He asks me for a dime - - a nickel or a quarter

I don't have and change so I'm stepping along

And as I'm waking past he sings to me this song:

There's a hole in the bucket - - dear Liza Dear Liza...

There's a hole in the bucket - - dear Liza a hole.

The shopkeeper sees me and says “what’s up”?

I’m thinking about the man who was holding up the cup.

I pay for all the stuff and get a pocket full of change

Should I give it to the man is the question in my brain.

What’s gonna happen if I give the man a dime?

I don’t wanna pay for another brother’s wine.

I’m not responsible for this man’s depression

How can I find compassion in the middle of a recession?

AND - - how come these questions keep messing with my head?

And I still can’t remember WHY I need a spool of THREAD.

I walk right past him and think about it more

Back at the house I’m opening up the door.

A pocket full of change don’t mean that much to me.

My cup is half full - - his is empty.

I put back on my cap and start heading back

I reach into my pocket and have a HEART ATTACK!

I’m diggin deep - - and screaming “oh no”!

Because there’s NOTHING in my pocket - - but a great big HOLE!

NOW - - NO one has the change - - and it’s messing with my head.

But NOW I know the reason WHY - - I need the spool of THREAD!

There’s a hole - - in my pocket - - dear Liza...

How do we live our lives - - with TRUST?

And what is the best way to do that - - given where we are planted?

Is it possible - - that we have some RESPONSIBILITY - - in SPITE of where we are planted? / And that part of that responsibility - - is th think about OTHERS - - and the CHALLENGES of where they are planted.

Would the Roman Centurion - - have had compassion on the widow of Nain - - in the story in Luke's gospel?

And what does it mean that Jesus - - heals BOTH of them - - no matter what?

As I think about the choices I have made...

And my own struggles with trusting God...

The words of C. S. Lewis - - in the preface of his book "The Great Divorce"
are helpful...

The divorce that C. S. Lewis describes is one between heaven and hell.

He says - - heaven - - and hell - - can NOT be married.

Good - - and evil - - do NOT mix.

In the END - - we must CHOOSE - - where we will be planted.

He writes:

"You cannot take all your luggage with you - - on every journey.

On one journey - - even your right hand - - and your eye - - may be among the things you have to leave behind. / I do NOT think that - - everyone - - who chooses the wrong roads - - perish. / BUT - - their rescue consists - - in being put back on the right road.

Evil CAN be undone... BUT - - it can NOT develop into good.

Time does not heal evil.

The spell - - must be UNWOUND - - bit by bit.

In the end - - it is still - - either or.

If we insist on keeping hell - - we will NOT see heaven.

If we accept heaven - - we will not be able to retain - - even the SMALLEST and most INTIMATE - - souvenirs - - of hell.”

The truth - - of Jeremiah’s vision of TWO plants - - is similar.

If we trust in God - - we will be like a tree planted by water.

NO MATTER - - where we are planted - - in THIS world.

No matter IF we are socially connected and powerful - - or NOT!

Will we give in to our negative judgments of others?

OR - - will accept that we ALL live by GRACE?

Grace - - mercy - - and healing...

Offered by Jesus - -

There for our choosing - -

No matter who we are.