**10-27-19**

**Be Not Dismayed**

**By Rev. Sheryl Stewart**

Jeremiah 14: 7-10, 19-22 2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 16-18 Luke 18: 9-14

RR: Psalm 84: 1-7

**Summary: In this life, we can offer God the gift of a perfect, righteous life. This is not our own history, but the life of Jesus, given for us.**

Life can be discouraging; God knows that and so did the prophet Jeremiah. Israel and Judah, the people of God, were captives in Babylon and the Temple had been destroyed. Worst of all, their own sins had brought them to this terrible reckoning, and they had to acknowledge their part in a national disaster. That led to discouragement and dismay; yet the prophet knows that, despite sin, God’s love can be counted on. For Israel and Judah, future years bring freedom, the rebuilding of the Temple, and the miracle of holy oil which should not have lasted a night burning for the full seven days of Hanukkah.

The hard knocks of life don’t ease up in the New Testament. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul, writes that he has done his best, kept the faith, and knows God stood beside him when everyone deserted him. Even so, Paul has come to a point in his life when he knows he will soon be sacrificed, as was his Lord and Savior before him. I would not begrudge him some discouragement, but he is not dismayed!

The Gospel lesson is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the temple, but it is in the same section as last week’s parable of the widow and the unjust judge. Both are parables on prayer and were noted by Luke as being told with the intention to encourage people to keep praying and not lose heart. They should be considered together. Even the rogue judge will give the persistent woman her rights, evidence that God, an infinitely better judge, will restore us. Then comes the Bible’s most haunting question: “Will the Son of Man find faith on the Earth when He returns?” I cannot but think Jesus’ other parable connects to this query.

The tax collector was discouraged, and rightly so, by his sins. The nearby Pharisee, in contrast, was so sure of himself. Yet, the sins of the former were not so high that God could not step over them to lift him up. Here is our hope of Universal salvation, as God’s love overcomes even the walls of sin that we have ourselves erected. In contrast, the pedigree, knowledge, and piety of the Pharisee could not be piled high enough for him to reach up and touch God on his own merit. One man leaves worship with faith while the other leaves only with the self-satisfaction with which he came. If the Son of Man is to find faith, His people must learn to trust God and not themselves.

The time will come soon enough for me, and for each of you, to return our spirit to God. Have I, have you, fought the good fight like Paul and run our best race? Sometimes, yes; sometimes, no. Yet, the prize Jesus has ready for Paul and for anyone who trusts our Savior – a righteous life to offer God – is Jesus’ own life.

Despite his good race, Paul’s life was not the prize that he might show to God. Only Jesus lived a righteous life, and He offers that life to each of us to show to God at the Day of Reckoning. No sin of mine, nor all of them piled together, is high enough to prevent Jesus from stepping over that wall to lift me up. Not all the good I have done or all the sermons I have preached can build a platform from which I might step into heaven on my own. It is not so much that I have won the prize, it is that the Prize has won me! So, soul, why are you discouraged?

If we cannot pray like Peter and we cannot preach like Paul (and we can’t), we can tell the love of Jesus and say He died for all. I can do that and so can you. Let’s leave here and persist in doing that very thing. God will prevail and Jesus will indeed find faith on Earth when He returns. Amen!