

Pentecost 3A, Proper 7; June 25, 2017
 Ken Wratten at St Luke's
 Jeremiah 20:7-13
 Romans 6:1b-11
 Matthew 10:24-39

When you study the context of the reading from Jeremiah, you can't help but sense the frustration pouring out of him. He prophesied disaster for Jerusalem because the people were so 'stiff-necked'. The Temple chief priest Pashhur had Jeremiah beaten and put in stocks. And so he wrote "The word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long." Being a living witness for God can be very unpopular. But he still felt compelled to publically proclaim the word of God.

There is a tension in the Gospel lesson, too.

Jesus has told us that he and the Father are one; and we are one with them; one body among those who have made the decision to follow him.

In the reading today he says that he comes to set father against son - between those who decide to follow, and those who decide not to follow Jesus.

This is Jesus' call to make a decision about what we do about him.

This past week I met with someone from my previous parish. Some people there have been discussing the absence of division they experienced. They realized there is plenty of division in the country, in the Anglican Communion, in the American Episcopal Church, so what was different in that parish?

It was a deliberate decision I made, and it directly relates to these readings today. It is about my take on how to 'put Jesus first'.

If we make a decision as an individual and as a faith family to follow Jesus, that is a commitment to unity (not uniformity). We can be a mix of conservatives, moderates, and liberals: theologically and politically – and we can decide that God's grace flows within each of us, even if we reach different conclusions. ('28 vs '79 BCP, contemporary vs traditional music) So even if I don't agree on a cause or a position another person holds, I can, and should, still pray with you, share the peace with you, study Scripture with you, and love you. I can do that because I know that above the things we might not agree on, **we agree on Jesus.**

I chose for 14 ½ years to not talk politics from the pulpit. I chose to avoid polarizing the faith community that I led as their priest and pastor. I place unity in Jesus as the higher calling.

That doesn't mean that we don't each have our passions for living out our best sense of the 'mind of Christ' in different ways. The apostle Paul felt a call to preach to Gentiles. The apostle Matthew was called to write his Gospel specifically to Jews. There were different positions on whether Christians had to first become Jews that persisted for many years.

Our Episcopal Church is a church with no a voice telling us how we are to think about controversial issues. We are expected individually to study and pray to reach a decision for ourselves. I think that is a harder course than being told, but one that honors the faith journey of each of us; and it calls us to walk the walk... to practice unity within the faith family, and to stand up for Christian values, morals, and goals among those who have not decided on Jesus, even if it is within our biological family.

I thought you should know why you won't hear me preach about the 'right choice' on whether to vote for Hillary or Donald; or what we should do about the Anglican Church of America, or whatever cause might divide us as a faith family, **as long as** we stay true to the teaching and call of Jesus.

Each of us has chosen to be a faith family; let's use this our faith family as a laboratory to practice choosing unity – even when we disagree; avoiding polarization in the community; always providing a safe place to prayerfully reach our own decisions how to proclaim Christ. And then, like Jeremiah, like Jesus, we can be bold to proclaim God's word to anyone we meet.

Amen.