

Second Sunday after Trinity, 2022

Deuteronomy 30.15-20a Hebrews 12.18-25 Psalm 95.6-end Luke 14.15-24

The Collect: Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service: grant, we beseech thee, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Deuteronomy 30.19,20 'I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him...'

The word 'curse' is not mentioned very often in our society. In Africa and Asia, people fear being the recipient of a curse. But, it is a very significant biblical concept. Curses can even affect more than one generation. I don't think we should gloss over this as though it is an unsophisticated primitive falsehood that should be disregarded by our enlightened modern selves. A few years ago, a colleague of mine based in Jerusalem as an historian and tour guide, was explaining the inside of ChristChurch, near the Jaffa Gate, to a group of Jewish visitors. He spoke about the Hebrew inscription on the altar, the ten commandments and the Lord's Prayer, and the resemblance of the building to a synagogue. He explained why the founders had come Palestine to share the gospel that Jesus is the Messiah. The first Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, Michael Solomon Alexander, had been a Rabbi in Plymouth prior to his conversion. Near the end of the presentation, a woman shouted out a curse against my colleague. In Hebrew he rejected the curse, and carried on to pray a blessing on them all.

On YouTube you can see a contemporary scene where Messianic Rabbi Rav Porat was standing near the Western Wall, discussing salvation with an Orthodox teacher of a religious school. In fact, the name Yeshua translates as 'salvation, or he saves.' He asked the Orthodox Rabbi what they call Jesus. 'Yeshu' was the response. No, that is a curse. It is an acronym for 'may his name be blotted out.' So, wittingly or otherwise, many non-believing Jews pronounce a curse on Jesus if they incorrectly name Him. They still believe in curses, and there are consequences for those who knowingly blaspheme the name of our Lord.

How often the name of Jesus is used flippantly, in anger, or through lack of patience. As I said last week, there are dangerous consequences for those who eat of the Body of Christ without discernment. The name of Jesus carries great power. In Proverbs 18.10 we read: 'The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous run into it, and are safe.' In Philippians 2.9-11 we hear: 'Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'

Of course, some, perhaps many, in our own society have never given a moment's proper thought to what they say, or how they react when under stress. It is as if words don't really matter; they don't carry any substance to them. But, a word spoken by the Lord has the power to transform any human or natural condition. Sadly, blindness seems to have fallen on so many who blithely accept that black and white equal any colour or tint you like, or even the whole spectrum. Such confusion is of the devil; the father of lies.

I believe that curses have been a malign influence on the lives of many people in various cultures; despite the cultural suppositions used to describe cursing. The people of God, by virtue of being the enemies of Satan, will be under attack until the final battle is over. Even if assaults are not open warfare (like in Ukraine and Syria etc), the language of the devil is to curse, not to bless. He seeks to undermine, not to undergird. We, as members of the Body of Christ must also be on our guard against the wiles of the devil in our own fellowship. We must guard our minds and tongues against the devil and all his minions in what we say to each other, and to those outside our congregation. Our godly approach should always build up and not tear down. We should be exemplars of blessing. The reading from Deuteronomy (30.15ff) says: 'See, I have set before you this day, life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God... by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments... the Lord your God will bless you.. but (if you) are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them... you shall perish.' There is a choice between a blessing and a curse. We must choose life.

Brothers and Sisters, the Bible is replete with encouragement as well as warnings. We are likely to fall short and to make bad choices because we are fallible human beings. The world, the flesh and the devil are constantly pressing upon us. Nevertheless, our intention, our actions, and our conversations should be a light to others because our life is hid with Christ in God. We are soldiers in battle against curses or cursing. Colossians 3.1ff 'If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you are dead; and your life is hid with Christ in God.' If what we say to each other sounds more like a curse than a blessing, then we display more of satan's strategies than Christ's compassion. But, nor should we accept a curse being laid against us. The Blood of Christ and the Name of Jesus, will protect us, and nullify any attempt to harm us. It is wise to pray his protection over us everyday, for the battle continues until He returns. Choose life.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen.