

Year A Proper 12, 21st June 2026

Jeremiah 20:7-13. Romans 6:1b-11. Matthew 10: 24-39

Wow, our readings this morning are real humdingers – a deeply theological term, I assure you...

Jeremiah, not the most cheerful character in the Bible, appears to be complaining to God because he has been given the gift of prophecy and is compelled to use it. Jeremiah is also concerned about those people, and there seem to have been plenty of them, who want to persecute and maybe even kill him. He uses imprecatory prayer to his Lord, seeking retribution for how he has been treated and may be in peril in the future. Imprecate is a lovely word we seldom get to use. It means to call down by prayer to invoke harm or evil upon someone, or to personally curse someone.

Are you shocked to hear such an upstanding and God-fearing person pray to God that harm may happen to someone else? Have you read some of the psalms¹ which are notorious for their imprecations? Should such words be in our Holy Scripture?

The answer is yes. These imprecations are the honest emotions and feelings of people that they pour out in prayer to God. Do we hold back and offer God benign and meek prayers, rather than occasionally showing all aspects of our humanity and letting it rip? God can take it. God is big enough and gracious enough to hear your cries of retribution and revenge, and know that you are not really asking God to rain fire and brimstone down on some poor person who managed to cut you up on a dangerous section of the A702! And if you really do mean it, God is as good at being deaf to your unjust imprecations as Misty was deaf to my call of 'come. And would continue to roll in something very smelly in the field.

Paul's letter to the community of Christians in Rome, a small part of which we heard this morning, is a major piece of theology that was intended as an introduction from Paul prior to his visit. This letter is quite different to his others as he has yet to meet this community. His other letters are to Christian

¹ Psalms 35, 59, 69, 109, 137, and 140 are the major psalms identified as imprecatory.

communities he has either planted or sustained for quite a while. In this letter he appeals to the recipients, and to us nearly 2000 years later, to recognise that when we choose to follow the ways of Christ, we give up our 'old self' that was too worldly and what Paul calls 'full of sin'. That makes us much more alive to God in Christ, as we are more able to follow Christ's ways.

Our Gospel reading appears to have Jesus being quite confrontational. He reassures his followers that they should proclaim the kingdom of God and the Son of Man has come, knowing it could be very dangerous if not fatal. Jesus recognises that his mission will divide people, including between close family members and between friends. Jesus says that someone who chooses not to follow him because they want to keep peace with their family members, are not worthy of him. We need to be clear that Jesus knew that those who were not really committed to the cause would melt away as soon as the going got hot. He needed to give them a warning now, so they could decide whether they wanted to commit to a dangerous way of living.

Today's readings aren't the best advertisement for Christianity, and may be are not readings we would choose to use if we had people trying out church for the first time!

However, there are rich pickings within each text, if we are prepared to become a disciple in faith, and set our minds to be engaged with and to grow in faith. To be curious, to formulate and ask questions, to want to know more and not be satisfied with fifteen minutes every Sunday to feed your faith development. To be regularly interacting with our faith and deepening our knowledge and relationship with God.

Over the last six and a half years I have run a wide variety of faith development activities, with input from Joy, and with Joy and some others also leading sessions. We have done:

- ✚ Weekly Bible studies based on books or part of a book of the Bible.
- ✚ Six to eight week courses on foundational Christian issues, that would suit someone new to faith as well as experienced folk.

- ✝ Lent and Advent Studies using course materials available to buy or developed by us, visual and text based.
- ✝ Reading three or four faith-related books each year and discussing each book over an evening chat.
- ✝ Using books as a basis for weekly discussions.
- ✝ Exploring the previous week's sermon.
- ✝ Prayers of Intercessions workshops.
- ✝ A half-day of writing psalms about the climate crisis.
- ✝ Exploring various theological issues by listening to and commenting on a podcast.

Some of these have been meeting in person in the Church Hall, in the Rectory, or in the houses of a group member. Some have been on-line, especially during evenings in late autumn, winter and early Spring.

After a recent Vestry meeting it was agreed that before deciding all of our faith development activities for autumn and winter, and thinking about Jan to March next year, the congregation should be consulted about what they would like, as well as where and when. It would also be useful preparatory work for the congregational profile that will need to be produced, to have evidence of what faith development activities the congregation are interested in attending as they continue to grow in faith.

Turn to your neighbours in the pews, and have a conversation. Ask:

- ✝ What the faith development activity have you enjoyed the most?

- ✝ What made it so memorable and enjoyable?

- ✝ Has there been anything else you have done, either here or elsewhere, that has significantly helped you grow in faith?

- ✝ What method of engaging with faith development works best for you?
(in person, on-line, in church hall, in someone's home, reading/studying on your own at home, etc)

- ✝ What time of day is best for you to engage in faith development activities?

- ✝ What topics would interest you? Be specific, not just Bible-study. Maybe specific books, or maybe exploring different themes or characters in the Bible. Examples are (not exhaustive):
 - Reading the Bible and studying it
 - Reading a Bible Commentary or Bible Study book
 - Reading a book on a theological theme, such as: generosity, women in the New Testament, The 'I Am sayings', Psalms, The Holy Spirit, The Creeds, The Desert Fathers, . etc.
 - Watching a video or film that has moral, philosophical or faith related themes, for discussion.
 - Listening to a podcast and discussing it.

Consultation

Faith Development Activities

Please add any additional comments overleaf.

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| What the faith development activity have you enjoyed the most? | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| What made it so memorable and enjoyable? | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| Has there been anything else you have done, either here or elsewhere, that has significantly helped you grow in faith? | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| What method of engaging with faith development works best for you? (in person, on-line, in church hall, in someone's home, reading/studying on your own at home, etc) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| In person | | On-line | | Home Group | | Study on my own | | | | | | |
| Other: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| What topics would interest you? | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Bible reading and studying | | | | Bible Commentary/study guide | | | | | | | | |
| Themes | | Video/film & discussion | | | | Podcast & discussion | | | | | | |
| Other: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| What themes or subjects would you like to explore? | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| What days are best for you, for faith development activities? | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mon | | Tues | | Wed | | Thurs | | Fri | | Sat | | Sun |
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| What times are best for you? | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Morning | | | Afternoon | | | Evening | | | | | | |