

MINNESOTA VALLEY CHURCH; February 16, 2025
Sixth Sunday after Epiphany; Singers: Fuglebergs

PRELUDE: Carol Gustafson

CALL TO WORSHIP: Psalm 1

PASTOR: Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked

ALL: Or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

PASTOR: But his delight is in the law of the LORD,

ALL: And on his law he meditates day and night.

PASTOR: He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.

ALL: Whatever he does prospers.

PASTOR: Not so the wicked!

ALL: They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

PASTOR: Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,

ALL: Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

PASTOR: For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,

ALL: But the way of the wicked will perish.

HYMN #575 “Count Your Blessings”

CONFESSION OF SIN: *Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess to You that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed. Therefore we flee for refuge to Your infinite mercy and ask You for Christ's sake, grant us forgiveness of all our sins, and by Your Holy Spirit increase in us true knowledge of You and of Your will and true obedience to Your Word, to the end that by Your grace we may come to eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE:

READER: Luke Johnson

EPISTLE LESSON: *1 Corinthians 15:12-20 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. 20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

GOSPEL LESSON: *Luke 6:17-26 He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, 18 who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, 19 and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all. 20 Looking at his disciples, he said:*

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

21 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

22 Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you

*and reject your name as evil,
because of the Son of Man.*

*23 "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your
reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the
prophets.*

*24 "But woe to you who are rich,
for you have already received your comfort.*

*25 Woe to you who are well fed now,
for you will go hungry.*

*Woe to you who laugh now,
for you will mourn and weep.*

*26 Woe to you when all men speak well of you,
for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.*

READER: Here ends the reading of God's Word.

**CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad
Tidings!**

CONFESSION OF FAITH: I believe in God the Father
Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His
only son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of
the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified,
dead and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose
again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And is seated on
the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall
come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit;
The holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints; the
Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life
everlasting. Amen

GLORIA PATRI: *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to
the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is not, and ever shall
be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS & PRAYER

Worship Songs: Chosen by Carol

**SERMON: "CHOOSE YOUR LIFE: CURSED OR
BLESSED" Jeremiah 17:5-8, Pastor Tom Olson, 2/16/25**

CHOICES; The choices we make determine the quality of the life
we live. We all have unchangeable parts of our life, like the family
we were born into and our life up until this point. How we respond
and react to life is important. The question today is this: What will
we choose: a curse or a blessing?

JEREMY: Several of us visited Jeremy Hunter this week. I told
Jeremy that he is an inspiration to me. Jeremy has muscular
dystrophy and is getting weaker. He could be bitter about it, but he
chooses to live life as abundantly as possible. He enjoys music, he
has many interests, he loves people both young and old and he
does not complain, even when he is in great pain. He chooses to
live in a state of blessing, in spite of his troubles.

"CHOOSE YOUR LIFE: CURSED OR BLESSED" from
Jeremiah 17:5-8.

I. FRUITLESS: CHOICES THAT CURSE OUR LIFE

*Jeremiah 17:5-6 This is what the LORD says: "Cursed is the one
who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and
whose heart turns away from the LORD. 6 He will be like a bush
in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes.
He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land
where no one lives.*

EXPECTATIONS: Jeremiah says that a cursed life comes from
expecting other people to make us happy. Here are some people
who cannot make your life happy:

- a marital partner,
- children
- work colleagues

- politicians
- school teachers
- pastors
- friends.

GRARANTEE: I guarantee you that they won't make you happy. They will not meet your expectations. They will fail you. **AND YOU WILL FAIL THEM.** If you expect others to meet your needs, you will live under a dark cloud, a curse. You can't make yourself happy either. If you expect happiness to come from within your soul, I guarantee you that your will disappoint yourself too.

WASTELAND: Jeremiah tells us here that if we put our trust in **MAN, INCLUDING SELF**, that we will be like a dried-up bush, we will not see prosperity, we will dwell in a parched land, we will be lonely like someone living in a barren salty wasteland. A salty place is where nothing grows. It is a picture of someone who only sees the negative sides of everything.

FAMILY: If we think that a marital partner is going to take away our unhappiness, we will have a cursed marriage as we suck the life out of that person in order to feed our own dry soul. If we think that having children will be our source of happiness, just wait until you experience a child with colic that cries all night, or strong-willed two-year-old or a rebellious teen-ager. They cannot be your source of joy.

OTHERS: The same goes for people at work, the neighbors around you, your extended family and even the people here at church. We are all faulty human beings that cannot be the source of another person's abundant life. I guarantee you that no matter how hard I try to do my job, I will disappoint those who expect me the fill the empty place in their souls. This world and life itself cannot take away the curse of your empty soul.

AGE: The Bible warns us that putting our hope in other people leads to unhappiness at best and ruin at worst. Even superior

athletes eventually grow old and can barely get out of the chair they are sitting in. I am amazed that some of the feeble people I visit in nursing facilities were once great athletes. Brilliant scholars and business leaders grow forgetful and can't even recall the names of their children.

DISAPPOINTMENT: Life is very disappointing if we put our trust in human strength and in the people around us. Putting our hope in others leads to disappointment and depression when they don't meet our expectations. Putting our hope in others leads to a miserable, lonely existence. Sadly, I have met many such people over the years...crabby, complaining, negative, bitter, people. They live in their self-imposed prisons of unrealistic expectations. One word describes their life: **CURSED.**

WORCHESTER: Have you watched video footage from the town hall meetings in Worcester, Massachusetts this past week? A group of people are trying to make Worcester into a "sanctuary city for transgender people." Have you seen what the people arguing for this look like? Have you heard their tone of voice and the way they talk...hysterical, viscous, cackling, whining...there is only one word to describe these pathetic people who I truly feel sorry for. It is cursed.

HOPE: But it doesn't have to be that way. You have to stop looking to people for happiness. There is a way to live an abundant life no matter what the circumstances may be.

II. FRUITFUL: CHOICES THAT BLESS OUR LIFE

Jeremiah 17:7-8 "But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. 8 He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

FAITH: Jeremiah goes on to describe choices that help us live a **FRUITFUL** life of blessing and joy, no matter what our circumstances are. The only way to live a blessed life is to **TRUST THE LORD**. Satan is the curse maker but Jesus is the curse breaker. A personal faith and trust in God will enter us into a blessed life that can be lived above any circumstances, including muscular dystrophy.

JEHOVAH: Who is this LORD (JEHOVAH, YHVH) we are to have confidence in? He is the creator of all things, Genesis 1&2. He is eternal with no beginning and end, Revelation 22. He is all powerful, all knowing and everywhere present, Colossians 1. He loves us so much that he found a way to redeem us from our sinful and fallen state, John 3:16, Ephesians 2:4. He is the one who is preparing an eternal home for us in heaven where He will receive us by his grace and mercy, John 14. He is the one who died for us on the cross.

CONTEXT: Jeremiah lived in difficult times. His nation had rejected God and foreign invaders were overcoming them. Soon everything would be destroyed and Jeremiah would be taken away with the survivors into captivity to die there. Living in this fallen world can be difficult at times so Jeremiah tells us we need to have **CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD**. We need to take Him at His word and believe that all will eventually be well. Hope in the Lord keeps us going.

FLOURISHING: Notice that Jeremiah says here, and also Psalm 1 says, that the one who trusts in the Lord will be like a tree planted near a stream of water. It sends its roots out into the stream. Even a drought year with no rain can't stop that tree from flourishing.

CORY: Cory ten Boom was sent to a concentration camp along with her sister and father, who died in the camp after horrible treatment. Cory had her roots deeply grounded in her relationship with Christ. In spite of the terrible conditions and treatment, she flourished spiritually. When she finally was released, she went on

to be a dynamic witness for Jesus all over the world. I heard her when I was a teen-ager in the 1970's at the metropolitan sports center in Bloomington. I can still see her and hear her in my mind as if it was yesterday. She was radiant. She was even able to forgive the camp guards who misused, literally killed, her family. She lived in the **BLESSING** because her confidence was in the Lord.

WHEN: It is very important to notice here that our **PROSPERITY COMES IN A TIME OF DROUGHT**. The message here is that we all go through very rough years at times. We face situations that are as unbearable as a year without rain. But even in those times, there are blessings if we trust in the Lord.

GRANDMA: Sharon, Rebekah and I are reading my grandmother's autobiography that we stumbled onto. She recalls the terrible years of the great depression and World War 2 when they could not pay their mortgage, they had a hard time getting food, and my grandpa got a fever that kept him from work for a long time and made him physically weak on top of it. But her focus is that they were able to make it. Provision came in one form or another.

GRATEFUL: In the midst of it all, they had very simple and happy times that made them some of the most grateful, kind and generous people I have ever met. When we went to grandma's house, she never sat down, she continually served us. She was so happy to have food to share. Even though they were poor and my dad had a decent job, she would always dig five or ten dollars out of her purse and put it in my dad's hand as we left for home.

GENEROUS: There was a blessing on their simple lives. They chose to trust the Lord and not let the difficulty of life overwhelm them. My grandfather, in his old age, spent his extra time making oil paintings of beautiful scenes and spiritual themes, like Jesus surrounded by children. Sharon tells similar stories of her

grandmother's kindness and generosity, in spite of having no electricity in her home, even into the 1970's.

BLESSED: A blessed life is not necessarily one of great health or wealth or fame or power. A blessed life is one lived trusting God, thankful for simple things and anticipating the joys of heaven someday. I am of the opinion that it is not impossible but much more difficult to be wealthy and have a blessed life, than to be materially poor and have a blessed life. Probably the greatest blessing is to have peace in your soul.

Laura Story puts it this way in her profound song called BLESSINGS:

*We pray for blessings
We pray for peace
Comfort for family, protection while we sleep
We pray for healing, for prosperity
We pray for Your mighty hand to ease our suffering
And all the while, You hear each spoken need
Yet love is way too much to give us lesser things*

*'Cause what if your blessings come through raindrops?
What if Your healing comes through tears?
What if a thousand sleepless nights
Are what it takes to know You're near?
And what if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise?*

*We pray for wisdom
Your voice to hear
And we cry in anger when we cannot feel You near
We doubt Your goodness, we doubt Your love
As if every promise from Your Word is not enough
And all the while, You hear each desperate plea
And long that we'd have faith to believe*

When friends betray us

*And when darkness seems to win
We know that pain reminds this heart
That this is not, this is not our home
It's not our home*

*'Cause what if your blessings come through raindrops?
What if Your healing comes through tears?
And what if the thousand sleepless nights
Are what it takes to know You're near?*

*What if my greatest disappointments
Or the aching of this life
Is the revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy
And what if trials of this life
The rain, the storms, the hardest nights
Are Your mercies in disguise?*

SUMMARY: A CURSED LIFE is putting your faith in the people or things of this world. A BLESSED LIFE is putting your confidence in the Lord who has loved you for all eternity past and has amazing plans for you for eternity future.

1 Corinthians 2:9 "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"

Now may the peace of God that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen

HYMN #581 "Like a River Glorious"

LORD'S PRAYER: *Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen*

BENEDICTION

CLOSING SONG: Chosen by Carol.

POSTLUDE: Carol Gustafson