

Revelation 22:1-5

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Jeremiah 2:4-13

Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. Thus says the Lord: What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves? They did not say, "Where is the Lord who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that no one passes through, where no one lives?" I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination. The priests did not say, "Where is the Lord?" Those who handle the law did not know me; the rulers transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after things that do not profit. Therefore, once more I accuse you, says the Lord, and I accuse your children's children. Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look, send to Kedar and examine with care; see if there has ever been such a thing. Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for something that does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate, says the Lord, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.

Sermon

So let's just get right to it, this is not something new, you have heard it before - we are broken people. John Calvin, the forefather of the reformed tradition, reflecting on Augustine of Hippo, taught that humans are unable to avoid sin. This is the concept of total depravity, that though we are made in the image of God, though we bear God's image and we do many outwardly good things, we still have sin that affects all our nature and actions so that we are a jumble of broken goodness. It is true now as it was true in the days of Jeremiah.

Last week we began to examine the prophet Jeremiah, beginning with his call to be God's prophet. A calling to speak God's word, a word of correcting and of redirection, of renewal and concern. This week we examine what the greatest concern was for the Hebrew people at that time. It would seem that the people, rulers and religious leaders and commoners alike, that the people had fallen away from worshiping God and remembering God's gracious acts in covenant and redemption. The people had moved to worshiping "the next big thing" and had left behind the worship of the God who had been faithful in the past. "For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water."

Now most of you are probably smarter than me and already now what a cistern is, but I had to double check. Simply put, a cistern is a holding tank or bucket or pit for water. In Jeremiah's day, a cistern would normally have been a hold dug into the ground, similar to a well. The difference being that a well reaches underground water while a cistern only has water when it is filled by rain or by someone filling it from a well. You can imagine the great need for cisterns like these in the desert climate of Israel, a place where water can be scarce and so when the rain comes, you needed ways to store the water for longer periods of time. They "have committed two evils:" I'm not sure if truly this is two evils or really that the second is a consequence of the first.

The people have turned away from God, the fountain of living water, and in doing so they have searched for other things to bring them life. But when you turn from the one who is the creator and sustainer of life, everything else is inadequate, everything else is cracked cisterns, that are supposed to hold the water, but the water leaks out, doesn't last. And if we are honest with ourselves, we can find some places in our own lives where we have tried to do it on our own, tried to give ourselves life, tried to find life in places that don't hold water.

When we turn inward toward our own ego and our addictions and drive to create life, joy, and happiness - we find that we can do it for a while, but the life keeps seeping out and to maintain this type of life, we have to constantly be looking for new sources of water to refill the pits.

But there is hope within Jeremiah's prophecy of warning and frustration. Though we have and we continue to dig cracked cisterns in our life. The fountain of living water is still available. A fountain of life that flows freely without the aid of our hands. A fountain of joy that can quench our thirst for joy and love and life today and everyday.

So how can we tell the difference between our own cracked cisterns and the water of life? The first thing we must notice in our own life is whether we are trying to do it all our selves or if we are able to realize and give thanks and praise to God for the life that we have and the life that is sustained within us. Too often we believe that we must create happiness, we must create love, we must create life. We believe that it is our hard work and determination that is the source of joy and beauty. How easy it is to loose sight of the source of all that is beautiful and good and life giving. We need to come to the fountain, come to God in prayer and in worship, in humble servant hood and faithful gratitude.

And what comes forth when we connect to the fountain of life? Waters that heal, that bring smiles, that give a hand up, that help us laugh and cry with our neighbors. Waters that bring hope and light to our darkness and the darkness of others. Waters that give us life and through us bring life to others. And though we will still make mistakes, out of fear we will still dig cracked cisterns hoping to store up water for ourselves, we also know that the the river of life will stream for from the thrones and that the tree of life will grown upon the banks, bearing fruit and healing the nations, the tribes, the communities and you and me. Friends, let us drink from the fountain, for the water is cool and refreshing.