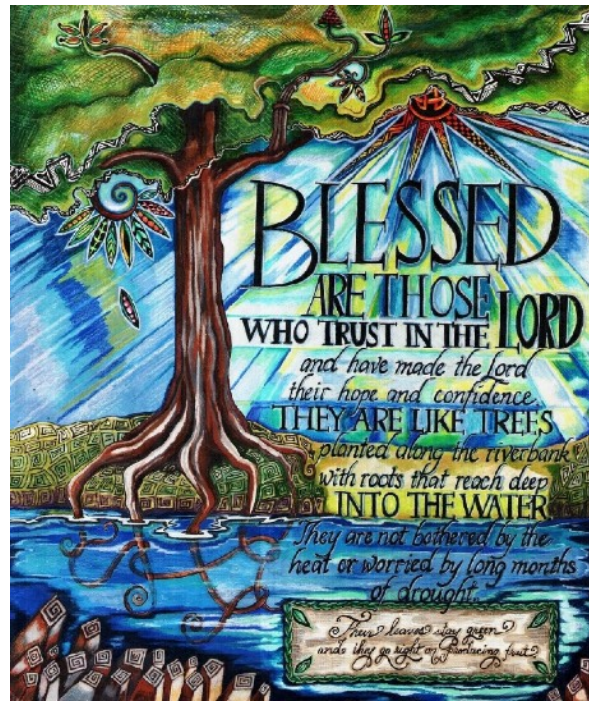


Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
The Reverend Dr Scott Everett Couper
Sunday, June 11, 2021
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

“We Have Not Failed to Bear Fruit”

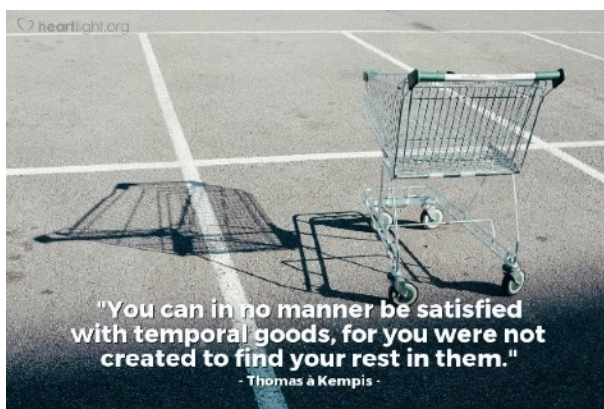
Hebrew Scripture: Jeremiah 17:7-8



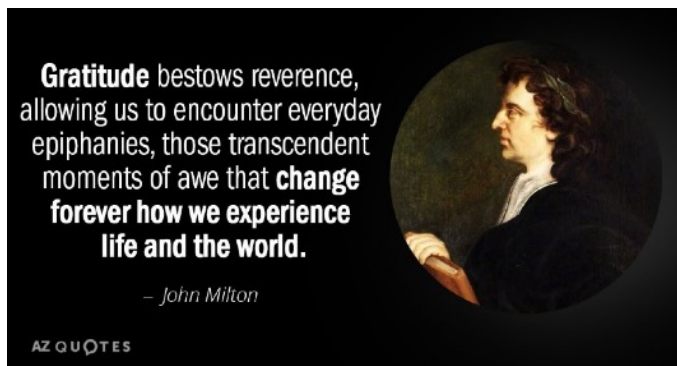
Being on vacation for two weeks gave me much time to think about myself and how I emotionally process life and behaviorally respond. Purchasing a home and coming to grips with maintenance issues has caused me to critically evaluate myself. I thank God for my wife, Stephanie, who counsels me. I have on many occasions over the last two months almost ‘lost my hat’ discovering all that needs to be repaired and maintained with a new home.



Right off the bat, the garage door opener malfunctioned. Right off the bat, the master bedroom air-conditioner displayed an error light. On day one, the movers broke the handle on the sliding glass door and its screen constantly comes-off the track! I am ashamed to say that my emotional state at times deteriorated. Truth be told, *my emotional state is a direct reflection of my spiritual state*. I have discovered that far too many times my sense of wholeness is dependent on silly and inconsequential matters. I am the beneficiary of a new home and I find myself becoming unnecessarily frustrated and unsettled. Fortunately, Stephanie offered me some counselling and helped me remember that from which my sense of wholeness ultimately comes and thus offered me a spiritual correction.



The font, the source, of my well-being is not in garage doors, blinds, grills, cabinets, and air-conditioners. Nor am I made whole by my vehicle nor by anything else material, temporal, and tangible. My peace comes from an on-going discovery of God, my calling and ministry at Centre Church, compassion and concern for others, worship, my integrity, appreciation in prayer with my family when we eat together, swimming in the lake, running in the forest, a beautiful conversation with Stephanie, reading Winnie the Pooh to Ana and Lydia, and reading the Bible in preparation for drafting this message. That which makes me, that which makes us all whole, is immaterial, unworldly, and transcendent.



The prophet Jeremiah chastised and warned his community of faith for their over-valuation and dependence on things that not only do not matter but also have a high probability of making us miserable and pathetic. And he counseled them with the two verses that Roger read for us this morning.



"But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They 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". Jeremiah stated that the source of our emotional and thus spiritual wellbeing MUST be the divine. If we value that which is of God, then there will be no shortage of fulfillment – ever. If we are always fulfilled by appreciating that which is divinely offered, then we will not ever 'lose our hats'; we will not be angry or frustrated; we will not fear. All will observe and marvel at the souls whose confidence is in that which is transcendent for they are content, alive, fresh, and bear many good deeds.

During the past year and half since the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world, Centre Church has had much to lament. We could very well have lost our collective 'hats'.



Unlike me unnecessarily lamenting the problems of a new home, I have observed little, if any, whining, complaining, or moaning at Centre Church during the far more serious pandemic. I have witnessed little, if any, contestation, arguments, or fits of frustration. In fact, I observed precisely the opposite. From those whose source of happiness is from the divine, there has been resilience. Our Finance Board (thank you, Anne Fecto) successfully applied *twice* for the PPP 'loan to grant' from the government.



During Easter, Mission & Service raised money for our sister church in El Salvador. Mary-Milkey-May and Jenifer Ambler cooperated extraordinarily to provide virtual

worship and music to us though we could not gather in the sanctuary. Bonnie Girvan led a guided meditation service each Sunday morning. Matt Dean and Daniel Guerra began a Pub Theology fellowship that is very popular. I could go on and on.



What I wish you to hear this morning is that throughout this pandemic I observed that this congregation's wellbeing is sourced by our members' love for God, our love for one another, and by our work in the community through the Brattleboro Centre for Children, Loaves & Fishes, and ZOOM worship services that always provided us the font for our emotional and spiritual nourishment. For a year and a half, Center Church focused on that which was transcendent and not that which was temporal. Jeremiah would be proud of our church.

In the report provided to you for your meeting after the worship service today, you can read why I view our congregation in light of Jeremiah's proclamation.



So, I say: “Blessed are the people of Centre Church whose confidence is not in a building built by human hands nor in a tradition shaped by human culture. Centre Church is like a tree planted by the water that sends its people out into the world. Centre Church does not fear when the pandemic comes, its people are always faithful. Centre Church has no worries when people cannot gather in the sanctuary or when funds are scarce. Her members always faithfully carry-out their purpose, mission, and vision into the world”.

We have not failed to bear fruit.

This was the Word of God. And it was delivered to the People of God. And the People of God responded, “Amen!”