

**The Sixth Sunday After The Epiphany**  
**The Rev. James Lee Walker**

**02-11-07**

*Jeremiah 17:5-10*

*Psalms 1:1-2, 3, 4, 6*

*1 Corinthians 15:12-20*

*Luke 6:17-26*

When I preached at the 7:30 AM service this morning I was reminded of one Priest who I used to work with who told me about a sermon that he preached one day and he said, *it wasn't that it wasn't working, I just couldn't seem to get to the moment where I was saying what I really wanted to say.* And I said, well what did you do? He said, *I just kept talking on the theory that sooner or later I would say something.* And I had a little bit of that feeling this morning.

Now let me refer you back to today's readings. Let me read the first sentence from Jeremiah. Jeremiah is speaking on God's behalf: "Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts have turned away from the Lord." In other words Jeremiah is saying, *people are good, but if you're going to listen to someone for advice, if you're really going to build on a sure foundation, make sure that what you are building on is the word and message of God and not human values and human ideas and human laws.* Today's Psalm goes on with it in the first verse: "*Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked, not lingered in the way of sinners, not sat in the seats of the scornful. Their delight is in the law of the Lord and they meditate on His law day and night.*"

I know most of the faces sitting in front of me today - you're good people, you care about God. You care about your moral values and your ethics. I am sure that the more clearly you would come to see the true law of God, the more you would delight in it and would meditate upon it day and night. In fact I'm sure there are many here who are trying to do just that in their day-to-day life. The trouble we encounter is sometimes we find out that what we thought was the Law and the Word of God is really something that human beings have come up with.

I was raised, as I've said before, in the Anglo-Catholic tradition which has lots and lots of rules about everything. I can remember sitting in Seminary – this sounds so silly, but it was true – and listening to other Anglo-Catholic students saying they really had a lower opinion of Father So-and-So because they noticed that during the Prayer of Consecration he was not holding his fingers and thumbs in the proper "orans" position, positioning the two of them together in circles to show the completeness of the Christian faith. They were really serious that that mattered. Now hopefully I have not fallen into that trap as much, but I'll tell you some of the places where I have fallen into the trap and it's at the opposite end of it.

For a while, as a child, as a younger person and still today, I do get wrapped up in the trappings of human liturgies, of human laws, of human traditions. And sometimes trying to divest myself of things, I'd divest myself of the wrong things. We have just had Bibles placed in all the pew racks. I was so excited about that. Yet I know there are so many people today who pick up the Bible, read the stories, and say to themselves: "What a lot of silly, superstitious nonsense. I believe that the Bible is telling us something good, but angels flying around and people being

raised from the dead, and demons being exorcised, and seas of water parting and people walking through them? What is all that about? The people who wrote those stories were not scientific people like us today. How could they believe all that silliness?"

Let me share with you something I'm going through right now. I'm remodeling my house and I've gutted the kitchen, one bathroom, a laundry room, a walk-in closet, a wall, two walls are being moved in the house, windows are being torn out and doors are being sealed over – it's a really major remodel. Now, all the things that were in those rooms have had to be moved out. Any of you who have been to my home know that I have more stuff than most people do; I have never thrown anything away. My Mother says sometimes that's true of household garbage in my house too. But I've kept everything; stuff from when I was a little kid, little souvenirs, things from college, things that go along way back, and I've been coming across all sorts of old letters and essays I had written starting in 1<sup>st</sup> Grade and going through to Seminary, and as I've been going through this stuff its like finding little treasures. Some of it I will look at and read and I'll say, *wow, that's pretty cool, I can't believe I wrote that when I was in high school or in junior high.* Other things I look at and think, *oh my gosh! I not only wrote that I put it in a letter and sent it to the Bishop, what was I thinking!* And some of them are kind of cute and funny; my understanding as a very small child, some pictures I had drawn and saved of God up there and me down here, and that kind of layered society starting with Hell under the ground going up to Heaven up above the skies.

But one of the things that I did notice as I looked back, there has been a theme in my life. I've always been interested in the Church. I've always been interested in things spiritual. And sometimes I've had to come to grips with the fact that a lot of the stuff in the church that interested me was not particularly spiritual. The church can become corrupt; the church as a community, the church as an institution. But yet it is the very body of Christ that struggles with these issues.

Now what I felt a little bit this morning in my sermon was -- I walked out of there feeling like, well everything that I said was true -- but I walked out feeling a little bit like my kitchen, a bit unfinished, a bit stripped down to the walls. That kitchen! I went in there this morning, I mean they gutted it. You can look down and see the ground where the floor used to be. You can look up and see the underneath of the shingles. And they have ripped away the walls right down to the studs, and one of the things I was thinking was, you know, this kitchen (which is 71 years old, that's how old my house is), when you look at the walls all stripped down it is very structurally sound. They built good houses there 70 years ago; it's a better quality than what you would find today, but it needs to be updated, its hasn't grown with technology. Everything in my kitchen, every appliance, the heater for the dogs where they sleep in the laundry room, the light fixtures and everything have been running for 8 years off of one electrical plug that has lots of extension cords coming out of it and which I prayed the Fire Marshall would never come and find. So the piping and the electricity has to be upgraded, but there is a firm foundation there to build on and I felt the kitchen is somewhat an icon of myself right now.

Every once in a while I need to be stripped down to the bare bones. Sort of refitted and made new as only Christ can make us new. And when I do it I don't want it to be based just on my limited experience as one person living in one point of time in one geographic location, I want to

take ideas from everywhere. I've been on the Internet looking at the things like "The Kitchens of Tomorrow"; all of the fancy appliances and the things you can plug into; how you can have a computer connection in your kitchen and look up recipe's from all over the world from all sorts of people. I want to incorporate all of that and I also want to have some things that are old and cherished. I have a little statue that I've had almost 30 years; its one of the little resin statues. It's a woman in old Biblical clothing with a broom sweeping; it's called "Our Lady of the Kitchen". I'm going to keep that reminding me that in addition to raising the Christ child, she was also a woman who tended to the home.

People, what I'm trying to get at today - and I guess this sermon does end up unfinished just as my kitchen is. You've had those Bibles put there in front of you; I want you to read those stories, I want you to get into those pages, and I want you to realize something. Yes! Just like some of the things I wrote and I said when I was a child in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade about God who I saw in sort of a big Santa Clause kind of figure, a grandfather figure, what I said back then was silly and kind of missed the mark, except for one thing! I got it right that there is a God and I got it right that He was very interested in me because He loves me. That part I got right. And I have begun to understand that even though there are many things said in the Bible and by the Mystics and other writings that may sound a little dated and the imagery a little strange, those people had insights that are of great value and things are being said in their words, in their lives, that are of immense importance to us. It isn't easy to figure what is the law of human beings and what is the Law of God. It isn't easy always to be able to tell the difference between someone who has just presented you with the tradition of human origin and someone who has presented you with the very essence of the Gospel. But I'll tell you one way we do it.

We come together in this Sanctuary every week and at other times, and the reason God calls us together is because without each other you are as incomplete and unfinished as is my kitchen. But when we come and share our ideas and work together and talk about our experiences of God, we begin to grow and connect and the pieces of the puzzle come together. If you just come and sit here and do nothing else except come, sit, and then leave, you are missing the great treasure and you're cheating us out of everything you have to offer to us. Come in here and absorb what happens at mass, but then go to coffee hour and go out into the world and share it and talk about it. Not only what you have learned but the questions that are still unanswered, and don't just experience it with your brothers and sisters here in Huntington Beach. Experience it with your brothers and sisters who live throughout the United States, who are on the Internet, who are writing things and publishing books, and experience with an even a larger community of Moses and Jeremiah and Ruth and the Apostles, and that community that reaches across time. Look for the themes that exist in every generation; they may be expressed in different ways, but they are expressing the theme of love. And love is forgiving (as we read a few weeks ago), it is not proud, it is not boastful. When I have people walking up to me and telling me, *I speak for God and God has sent me to tell you how to run your life*, I run in the other direction. When I have somebody who comes up to me and says, *God is love and if I am to be God in the world then I will love you, and I will love you self-sacrificingly*, then I know I have a person in front of me who is really mirroring God. It is very important that we always put to the test, those things which we believe and put forth to find out if they are coming from our hearts or from the sacred heart of Jesus.

Now, what I'm going to do is be merciful, and watching that clock and I don't want to just keep talking and hope that sooner or later I'll say something, but I want to say that what leapt out of the Scriptures to me today was the importance of always sifting through everything we hear and do to know the difference of what people are saying and what God is saying. And, the funny thing is – its like talking to your own heart, and talking to other people and sharing with them openly about your lives that you're going to make the first step in that. And don't forget that community of family and friends found on the pages of that book called the Bible sitting in front of you. Absorb that and bring it in, in all of its strange and yet wonderful mystery and imagery. And as far as the conclusion to this sermon? Well, maybe before I die I'll get to it, just like I keep thinking that with the Contractor in my kitchen – maybe before I die we'll get it finished.

We are all works in progress and we have to remember: Where we find love, where we find peace, where we find self sacrifice, we are on the right track looking for the law of God and we can only do it together. It is a task beyond the capability of any one person.