

Waterworks
[Jeremiah 17:5-10](#), [Luke 6:17-26](#)
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For the last few weeks, I have been making a conscious effort while grocery shopping to buy things made in Canada. And for some things, that's pretty easy – Canadian meat, milk, eggs and dairy are all pretty easy to find, but fruits and vegetables are a little harder. Apples are straightforward, but there aren't a lot of farms or orchards in Canada growing bananas, oranges, or pineapples. As much as I might wish it were so, it can't be blueberry season all year round, and it will never be mango season. You can plant a mango seed and you might get a mango tree, but good luck getting that poor chilly little tree to ever put out a half-decent mango. That's just the way things are. If you want something to grow, everything needs to be perfect – you need the right amount of heat, light, soil and water to make your mango dreams become mango reality. If your tree is in the wrong place, it just won't produce any fruit.

And at first glance, that seems to be the message we get from our scripture readings this morning. Both the Psalmist and Jeremiah are making the same point – those who love God, who trust in the Lord, who delight in God's law and meditate on it day and night, they are like trees planted by streams of water, with green leaves producing fruit all year round, enduring through storms and heat and drought. In all they do, they prosper. But all those who don't love God, who trust in their own strength – the wicked, the

sinners, the scoffers, they are like shrubs in the desert, spindly, shriveled weeds struggling to survive in the parched places of the wilderness, the uninhabited salt lands. They are like chaff, drifting in the wind, rootless and fruitless. The righteous are blueberry bushes in Richmond in July. The wicked are a mango tree in January in Winnipeg. One will flourish and prosper and bear delicious fruit, and the other will not.

And that's a pretty straightforward message, nice and easy to understand. Here are the rules, follow them. Here is God's word – obey it. If you do, things will be good, and if you don't, things will be bad. Don't be like the wicked – don't follow their advice, don't take their paths, don't sit in the seat specifically reserved for scoffers, or you will end up miserable. Spend your time studying God's law, delighting in God's instructions, and everything will be awesome. And all of that is true. There's just one little problem. A lot of the time, we figure it also works the other way around. We look and we see someone who is doing great – whose life seems abundantly, richly blessed, bearing fruit 24/7, nice clothes, fancy car, happy family, tropical vacations to resort destinations with all the mangos you can eat – and we figure, this guy must be a saint! Look at how prosperous he is! He must meditate on God's law all the time, day and night! And then we see someone who is struggling, who can't find a job or a place to live, whose life is falling apart and who just can't make things work, and we think, well, this must all be your own fault. If you spent a little more time meditating on God's law, and a little less time sitting in the seat of scoffers, maybe you wouldn't be so sad. If you read these passages and you work backwards from

the blessings to the behaviour, you will end up in trouble – if you assume that the people around us who are prosperous and blessed must therefore be good, you have missed the point entirely.

That's why we need to hear the other passage, from the Gospel of Luke. At first glance, this passage seems to be saying the same thing as the other two readings – Jesus divides the world up into good and bad, faithful and unfaithful, blessings and woes. But there's a pretty major difference. Jesus is speaking to a vast crowd of people, a multitude that has gathered from all across the surrounding countryside – faithful Jews from Judea and Jerusalem, but also people from the coastlands of Tyre and Sidon, which is Gentile country – people outside of the nation of Israel, outside of God's covenant. And all these people who come to Jesus are people in need – the poor, the sick, the disabled, people troubled by unclean spirits. These people are not prosperous, successful entrepreneurs. They are not fruitful trees, planted by living streams of water, succeeding at everything they try, bearing fruit in every storm and drought. These people are not BC Blueberries, they are Manitoba Mangos. They are struggling to survive, they are desperate for help. And when Jesus sees them, he doesn't tell them that this is all their fault – that their struggles, their trouble, it's all because they haven't been following God's rules the right way. Jesus looks at them, and he blesses them, and he tells them they are blessed, right now, just as they are. Even if you're poor, hungry, hated, excluded, in the eyes of God, you are blessed, you will be blessed, you will be given everything you need. And as for all those who do have what they need, who already are full of good things and

rich blessings, Jesus warns them that they are headed for trouble. Those who are comfortable and successful and filled with good things, all those good things won't last forever. All those blessings won't truly bring them life.

And if that seems to be in conflict with what we heard from the Psalms and Jeremiah, well, take one more look. Luke tells us that when all these poor, troubled, miserable people came near to Jesus, power came out from him, and healed them. The closer they came to Jesus, the more they experienced his power, his strength, his healing, his love. The more they planted themselves next to Jesus, the more they drank from his life-giving Spirit, the more their lives burst into abundance, healing and blessing and life. The people who came to Jesus came to be blessed, they came to the water of life so that they could be rooted in him and experience his power at work in the world, in their lives. And they were only able to come to Jesus because Jesus first came to them. Jesus came down to these people to meet them, to bless them, to love them. By entering into creation and becoming a human being like you and me, Jesus came to us, Jesus brought living water, the very power and presence of almighty God, down to the people at the very bottom, the excluded outcasts, the poor and oppressed, so that they could know what it means to belong to the Kingdom of God, so they can rejoice and leap for joy. In Jesus Christ, God brings the living water into the desert, into the parched places in the wilderness and the uninhabited salt lands, to every dried up shrub, to every Manitoban Mango, Jesus Christ brings streams of abundant water, Jesus Christ brings blessings and power and life.

And the only thing that can stop that water from flowing, the only thing that can keep Christ's power from moving in the world, bringing life and blessing to every corner of this world, is when we think we don't need it. When we think we've already got everything we need. When we think we are already strong enough, blessed enough, wise enough, holy enough, because of our own efforts, our own wisdom, our own strength. Those who are full have no room to take in anything new – they are so comfortable with what they already have they don't realize they're missing out on what they desperately need. Those who take delight in the fine words of fair-weather friends don't realize they are ignoring the voice of the only one whose opinion truly matters. The living water that Jesus brings will flow everywhere, it will flood every desert, fill in every valley, cover every mountain, but all that water won't do us any good if we refuse to drink, if we are so filled with other things that we think are so important that we cannot make room for the blessings and love of God.

For most of us sitting here today in this church here in Richmond, we are so blessed. We have so many good things, so many rich blessings, so much abundance all around us. And we have all of these good things because of the love of Jesus Christ – because God has blessed us abundantly. All those blessings we've been given, all the good things we enjoy, none of them are things that we deserve because of our own wisdom or strength. They are all consequences of the grace of Jesus Christ, from his living water which came to us when we were alone in the desert, shriveled and dying, and brought us life. And as God's people, we are called to share that living water

with the world around us, to let it flow through us to other trees so that they can be blessed and experience God's love in us. And if there is anything in our lives that we are holding onto that is keeping that water from flowing – if any of our possessions, any of our comforts, any of our abundance has become so crucial to our identity, so important to us that we cannot imagine life without it, then we need to let those things go. Sometimes we hold on so tightly to our fears, to our desires, to our plans for the future, to our memories of the past. We hold on and fill our lives with things that keep us from growing, keep us from drinking deeply from the grace and love of Jesus Christ, keep us from sharing that love with the world around because we can only see our own need. And Christ's voice is calling to us to let go – to let go of everything that keeps his power from working in our hearts. Let go of everything that holds us back from loving the world as we have been loved. Let go of our need to succeed, let go of our measurements for success, let go of every strength that we think belongs to us, and drink deeply from the living water. Bring our brokenness, our frailty and our fear to Jesus Christ, and trust in his strength, trust in his love, trust in his everlasting life. Know that in Jesus Christ, we will grow rooted by streams of water, we will bear fruit for the kingdom of God. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.