

Yr. A, Proper 8  
July 2, 2023  
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan  
Christ Episcopal Church  
1722 words

Lessons: Jeremiah 28:5-9  
Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18  
Romans 6:12-23  
Matthew 10:40-42

The future of the country was hanging in the balance. Should we revolt against the foreign tyranny we despise...*or*...should we just ‘stomach it,’ submit a while longer to keep the peace? This was the question being debated by the prophets, Hananiah and Jeremiah. The stakes were incredibly high...for everyone.

The future of *this country* was hanging in the balance. Should we revolt against the foreign tyranny we despise...*or*...should we just ‘stomach it,’ submit a while longer to keep the peace? This was the question being debated by the Whigs and the Tories. The stakes were incredibly high...for everyone.

What do *you think* God wanted? What do *you believe* God supported?

Hananiah said that *his country* should revolt against King Nebuchadnezzar. It was a popular message. Even Jeremiah admits, “Amen! May the LORD do what *you* have prophesied.” In other words, Jeremiah shrugs and says, “Gosh, I hope you’re right.”

“AND”...Jeremiah adds...“as for the prophet who prophesies *peace*, when the word of *that prophet* comes true, *then* it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet.” In other words, Jeremiah is saying, “Time will tell.” We know that bold prophesies rarely come true quickly or easily.

Thomas Lynch, Jr. was 26 years old, marching to war as Captain of the S.C. 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment. He believed it was time to revolt against King George III. Thomas probably marched right down this road<sup>1</sup>, prepared to defend Charlestown from a British invasion.

Well, he never made it into battle. Young Thomas was stricken by a terrible fever, and had to stop. While recovering, he was elected by the S.C. General Assembly as a 6<sup>th</sup> delegate to the Continental Congress. Thomas also received news that his father, already a delegate in Philadelphia, had fallen ill. In April of 1776 Colonel Gadsden, the commanding officer, gave Thomas permission to travel to Philadelphia.

Within a few short weeks, the British fleet attacked Charlestown, and young Thomas Lynch dipped his quill into a bottle of ink and signed his name to a *bold*, prophetic statement. He—and fifty-five other men—attested to this idea:

“We hold these truths to be *self-evident*, that **all men** are created *equal*, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain *unalienable* rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”<sup>2</sup>

What a *beautiful vision* for a country to have. Those words from the Declaration of Independence were a bold prophesy for the future. They were *not*, as we know, a matter of *fact* at that time...for there were *so many* men, women, and children living in the land who were *not* considered equal.

Our founder’s bold vision for life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness—it did not apply to the slaves who had *long been* at work, building the foundations of an incredibly large, fertile, prosperous nation.

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<sup>1</sup> Our historic Church, built in 1708, was beside the road that led to the Cooper River crossing for Charlestown. We know it as Highway 17.

<sup>2</sup> Part of the opening statement of the Declaration of Independence.

Listen again to the words of Jeremiah: “As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of *that prophet* comes true, *then* it will be known that the LORD has truly sent (that) prophet.” Remember, bold prophesies rarely come true quickly or easily.

One of my goals as a pastor, priest, teacher, and preacher—is to speak the truth as well as I can understand it... even when it makes *me—or us*—uncomfortable. At the same time, my intention is *not* to shame people who made mistakes in the past—things done and left undone—especially if speaking such truth makes *me—or us*—feel somehow superior.

My intention is to shine light on how Jesus Christ is always inviting his disciples to dig deeper and try harder to do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly with God<sup>3</sup> *in the present*.

The gift of being born later in time than those who were unable to fully realize God’s dream of liberty, justice, and peace for every living soul, is that we get to envision new ways in which *we might contribute* to bringing about the fullness of our Founder’s bold prophesy.

Remember the words of Jeremiah: “As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet *comes true, then* it will be known that the LORD has truly sent (that) prophet.” In other words, “Time will tell.”

This next part of the story is harder to hear. Five years before young Thomas Lynch signed the Declaration of Independence, he signed *another piece of paper*. This 21-year-old man signed a pledge to make a cash donation to this Church—to *our Church*. You see, in 1771 the vestry recognized that this congregation could not afford to pay a suitable salary for a rector.<sup>4</sup>

So, they circulated a written request (called a Subscription) to raise a sum of money for the purchase of a family of slaves for “(quote) *the perpetual use* of the Minister of this parish.” Twenty-seven people pledged 400 pounds sterling for this purpose—today’s equivalent would be about \$110,000. One of those generous donors was Thomas.

I don’t have any doubt that those twenty-seven people believed they were doing a *good thing* for their Church. There’s no doubt that the vestry believed it was doing a *necessary thing* if they were to have any hope of recruiting and keeping a rector. This congregation had *already* been in existence for two generations—70 years—and, it had been *extremely hard*.

In many respects, this little Church out here in the country was hanging by a thread. I remind myself *every week* that the legacy of our spiritual forebears *here* at Christ Episcopal Church—is *not one* of ‘slam dunk certainty’. No! *Our legacy* is one of scrappy, determined faith...and hope.

So, I *get it*. I can imagine *myself* on that vestry back in 1771. “Hey,” I can hear myself saying, “We’ve got bills to pay. *And*—they exceed our ability to pay them.”

So, what do you *do*? You do what’s *legal*...you do what’s considered *normal*...you do what other congregations have done.

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<sup>3</sup> This threefold ethical formula is drawn from the heartfelt desire of God, according to the prophet, Micah.

<sup>4</sup> This, and other details about the connection between Thomas Lynch and Edward Rutledge with Christ Church parish are noted in [Christ Church 1706-1959: A Plantation Parish of the South Carolina Establishment](#), by Anne King Greogorie, Charleston, SC: The Dalcho Historical Society, 1961.

As I said earlier, we have a huge advantage of being born later in time with the benefit of many years and many prophets. We can easily see *now* that you *cannot hold* as self-evident the truth that all men are created equal...*and* at the same time, hold—as permanent property—human beings for “(quote) perpetual use” by other human beings, especially ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

There’s another prophet I want to mention—the biblical prophet, Joel. He attested to *this truth*, spoken by God: “In those days,” says the LORD, “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. Your sons *and your daughters* shall prophesy. Your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on male *and* female...**slaves**...I will pour out my spirit.”<sup>5</sup>

Is Joel a *true prophet*? Is God really that generous? Is God really *that supportive* of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness *by every living soul*? Did that *young man*, Thomas Lynch *really see a vision* for our country? Are *we*—old and young—really capable of dreaming *dreams* about what a beloved community can look like among the descendants of our forebears *and* descendants of *their slaves*...who still live *right here* in Christ Church parish?

Oh, by the way, Thomas was not the youngest signer of the Declaration of Independence. *That distinction* belonged to another young man, born three months after Thomas. His name? Edward Rutledge...who was *also* from Christ Church parish.

Now, how about *that?! Half* of the signers from South Carolina...of the *bold prophesy* of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for every person—**both** of those young people came from *our parish*!

In the light of the Declaration we *celebrate* on July 4<sup>th</sup>...in the light of the Declaration signed by two young *visionaries* from Christ Church, *what* is the Holy Spirit *saying*...to us...*right now*?

Well, *I* have a dream! I dream of this congregation *doing more* than just figuring out how to pay its bills. Despite my own, *obvious* interest in us paying a suitable salary for the rector, I *still* have a *dream*...and it involves doing *more* than what is considered normal for a parish to do. It involves being more gracious than what is *legally expected* of former slave owners to be.

I dream of *us* connecting the bold vision of the *Biblical prophets*...with the *beautiful vision* of those Philadelphia prophets...and with our *own*, true story. I dream of us *reclaiming* those hard-to-hear words—“for perpetual use”—reclaiming those words for goodness’ sake.

I dream of a 21<sup>st</sup> century Subscription List to create a perpetual “Christ Church Liberty Fund” for scholarships that benefit children within our parish boundaries who are descendants of slaves. I dream of volunteers from among you, helping circulate that vision to people beyond our congregation. There are many donors out there willing to be generous with a perpetual fund that allows *real people* with *real needs* the chance of an education to further *their pursuit* of happiness.

I want to put our feet on the courageous pathway of Thomas Lynch and Edward Rutledge—young visionaries from *our parish*, who pledged themselves to the bold, prophetic, idea that *everyone* deserves a shot at life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. What if we start with a goal of the 1771 Subscription amount—\$110,000? In a *perpetual* fund, that’s already a \$5000 per year scholarship *forever*!

Sadly, Thomas Lynch did not get to see his vision even *partially* realized. He and his young wife died at sea, just a few years after he signed his name to the bold prophesy we celebrate this Tuesday. Well, *we know* Jeremiah was right. Bold prophesies rarely come true quickly or easily.

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<sup>5</sup> Joel 2:28

Yet, the Good News lies *right before us*, in this historic place. We have an opportunity to help this vision become even more *fully* realized.

Jesus makes two wonderful promises in today's Gospel lesson. First, he says, "Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward."

And second, Jesus says, "Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the One who sent me. (Our heavenly Father, the Source of light and life, who is calling *us* to new life...in Jesus Christ our LORD.)

Amen.