

Jeremiah 17:5-8

6th Sunday after Epiphany

February 16, 1992

Last Monday I went to hear a Rabbi speak. At the Fairmont Temple in Beachwood Rabbi Lawrence Kushner from Massachusetts lectured at the 57th Annual Clergy Institute on Judaism. By the way, this is a different Rabbi Kushner than the one who wrote about bad things and good people.

OK I hope I share one thing he ~~had~~ said:
~~Today I'd like to share with you some thoughts he shared with us.~~

~~These ~~thoughts~~ ~~are~~~~
~~You know,~~ that miracle of the bush burning but not being consumed was really a rather low level miracle. Think about it. The Lord could have done something really spectacular, like a fly by of F-15's. Now that would have ~~really~~ gotten Moses' attention! But a bush burning, and not burning. I wonder why the Lord chose that.

He continued
One night I was sitting at home before the fire, and suddenly I got an idea. Do you know how long it takes before you can tell whether a piece of dry kindling is being consumed as it burns. 5-7 minutes I discovered. Moses couldn't have walked by and said, "O, look, that bush is burning and not being consumed." No, he must have stopped and watched and studied that bush and after a time realized that something special was going on here. Could it be that the Lord was finding out whether Moses was paying attention? Or whether he was lost in himself, mind set on another moment past or future. Maybe the Lord wasn't going to talk with someone who would be listening with half an ear, distracted, and so tried out the burning bush on Moses. And when he saw that Moses was there, all there, then he spoke.

That's what
~~So went~~ Rabbi Kushner *had to say.* ~~to~~ ~~story~~ ~~and~~ ~~his~~ ~~thoughts.~~ When I had heard, his thoughts started affecting my thoughts.

Tuesday nights I take Katie to swim practice in Oberlin. I drop her off at the old pool, then I walk down to the square and walk around and around for forty-five minutes. Its a big square, a trip around it takes me nearly ten minutes. Since late October most every Tuesday night this has

been my pattern. Which means I've walked around that park a lot of times. But this past Tuesday night was different.

Would I notice a burning bush? I asked myself. I answered, No. I'm too busy in myself. My mind is racing, thinking about what has been and what has been, what will be. Me.

Well, Tuesday night I opened my eyes, my ears, even my nose as I walked. I concentrated on not thinking, but on opening my senses. Feeling the wind, the tickle of my scarf. Hearing the tire noise of cars, the sound of distant laughter, the airplane, above, the creak of a car door opening. I looked, there are flags flying in that park I had never seen before, patterns in the bricks below my feet I had never noted though I had walked upon them again and again. What amazed me most is how each time I passed a section of that park I saw something new. Like the blue light just across the street that I noticed the third time around, the towers on the dorm reaching way into the sky like the towers of a castle.

Now today I am not standing before you to review my week. There is a point in all of this. For the Rabbi's lecture and the ~~walk~~^{walk} in the park have answered a great question for me.

Our first lesson reads: "Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord. They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.

Two types of people, those who trust in themselves and those who trust in God. Those who trust in themselves are like a withering, dying bush in the desert. Those who trust in God are like a bush that even in the time of searing heat is well-watered, fresh.

Now that is just the sort of thing you expect to hear at church.

But let's go out into the world and what do we see? Unbelievers all withered up? One translation of verse six says: He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. Is that the way things are, those who trust in themselves do not see prosperity? Why is it then that lots of folks who never pray drive fine cars and live in big houses?

Another translation says: He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. Has that been your experience with your unbelieving neighbors, only bad things happen to them? Sometimes it seems just the opposite is true, those who trust in God like Jesus have more than their share of suffering.

Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals, and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord.

Who curses them? Who withers them? The Lord who loves even them? Who gave his only Son to die for them, the ungodly? Surely God would not curse those whom he loves, those for whom Christ died. But if not God, then who?

There is a curious way of talking about God's judgements in scripture: God gave them up to a debased mind and things which should not be done, we read in Romans. He gave them up to the very things they seek, that is God's judgement. He lets us have our own way with ourselves.

Has your mind ever been so busy it would not let you go? Awake all night, distracted all day, unable to let go of your problems even for an instant? Have you known that sort of hell? This is the withering of which

the text speaks. The curse is that we have only faith in us, in human possibilities, faith in that which is not God. Worry, fear, a need for constant watching, these wear us, wither us and because our roots are sunk into nothing deeper than ourselves, we live in a parched place of the wilderness. God has not cursed us, but we curse ourselves.

And we don't see when relief comes, we don't see prosperity when it comes, we don't see any good come. Is it because God has abandoned us? No he send his rain on the evil and the good, and makes his sun shine on the just and the unjust. But our whole being us so focused on self that we never see the good, the prosperity, the relief that the Lord is sending and providing. We see only a burning bush, too much in a hurry to take the time to notice the miracle. We walk the paths over and over but see nothing of the blessings that God is providing. Relief is sent, prosperity is sent, good is sent, but our eyes are so fixed on our yesterdays and our tomorrows that we cannot see. This is the curse.

And the blessing? To trust in the Lord. Harsh, searing winds will blow, but leaves will not wither. Sun and heat will assault, but we will remain vibrant and alive, drought may come but our fruit will be abundant. Day after day the Lord will provide, and we will be blessed.

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. Amen.