Not a pretty picture, these readings for today. Even the collect didn’t save my bacon: Don’t get me wrong—it’s fine, but it doesn’t really send me. Poor me, poor preacher. But, really! "Violence and destruction!" "Terror is all around!" Granted, context helps a bit, the reassurance that the Lord is with Jeremiah. But, come on: the Lord is with him as a dread warrior!?

So let's look to the psalmist for some comfort. Here's what we get: “I have become a stranger to my own kindred . . . Zeal for your house has eaten me up . . . The drunkards make songs about me.”

We’ll give Paul a day off today, but he's not much of a help anyway, reminding us that sin is all around us, within us.

Even the holy gospel has Jesus saying, “I’ve come not to bring peace, but a sword.”

Not a lineup designed to launch a preacher into the pulpit, virtual or otherwise.

Well, let's see what we can find—some vein of good news in this dark mine of death and destruction. Violence and destruction, to be precise.

Before doing that, even, we must acknowledge that the Bible *is* timeless. Jeremiah could be writing about pandemics and racial injustice in today’s paper. Or today’s blog. And just Friday we observed Juneteenth, the annual reminder that there will always be those in power who will postpone or withhold justice from those who are powerless and without a voice.

In this very passage, though, Jeremiah offers a last-minute Hail Mary, turning all the dire news on its head by proclaiming, prophesying: “For he has delivered the needy from the hands of evil doers.” That strikes me as the clincher in this passage and comes last, giving it pride of place. It is, in literary terms this time, the bottom line.

The psalmist's last phrase, which comes in the form of a prayer, is similarly pointed: "Draw near to me and redeem me; because of my enemies deliver me."

Though I said I’d leave him alone today, Paul does snatch this good news out of the mire of the rest of his sin-soaked language: Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

That “dead and alive” thing strikes me as the major theme in these readings. Swords and terror and sinking in the mire, and then, finally, Jesus' own words: “Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

That pairs well with an other saying of Jesus: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

This life and death business underscores that we are all called to a necessary and definite decision, a decision to embrace a life that counts for something larger than ourselves. It’s a decision we have to make over and over again, especially as we learn more about the world and ourselves. It involves never branding anyone an alien, because we are all, in Jeremiah’s terms, kindred. It’s about surrendering the idea that our lives count only for ourselves. Or better put, to recognize that “ourselves” equals everyone on the planet.

Then we find and live our true lives, the ones for which God created us.

Perhaps finding our lives, living abundantly, depends upon our having long and broad memories, recalling that we are all children of a common parent, one creator.

There are tremendous forces at work in the world whose power and interests are served by our finding differences among ourselves, defining ourselves primarily as not like “those people,” whoever they may be at any given point in history. I’m not an advocate of reducing faith to what will fit on a bumper sticker, but I am irresistibly drawn to: “God bless everyone; no exceptions.”

It does sometimes feel like taking on the world, trying to turn the tide against those who would suppress and oppress others. God sometimes seems the only ally, and is always the best one. May we set this good above all others: to seek God’s guidance in the pursuit of justice for every human being, to recognize the dignity of all our brothers and sisters, as we proclaim in our baptismal vows when we became people whose lives are found in Christ. + + +