

GUEST PASTOR KLUG

Pentecost 3, June 21, 2020

Trinity, Beloit

Jeremiah 20:7-13; Psalm 91:1-10; Romans 6:12-23; Matt. 10: 5a, 21-33

Jeremiah 20: 7-13 *7) O LORD, You persuaded me, and I was persuaded; You overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. (8) Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. (9) But if I say, "I will not mention Him, or speak anymore in His name," His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed I cannot. (10) I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side! Report him! Let's report him!" All my friends are waiting for me to slip saying, "Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him." (11) But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. This will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonor will never be forgotten. (12) O LORD Almighty, You who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see Your vengeance upon them, for to You I have committed my cause. (13) Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.*

Stanley Yelnats, had a story to tell, an absolutely unbelievable and improbable story. Stanley, a rather mild mannered, overweight fifth grade student, was often picked on by the class bully. On this particular day, Stanley missed the school bus because the bully had taken his notebook and thrown it into the toilet in the restroom. So, Stanley missed the bus because he took the time to fish his notebook out of the toilet.

So Stanley walked home from school that spring day. As he passed beneath the interstate, a pair of baseball shoes fell out of the sky and hit him in the head. Those shoes had been donated to charity by the star player of the Texas Rangers and had a value that, at an auction for the charity, would have yielded quite a sum of money for the charity. But now, strangely, they were in Stanley's possession.

But he didn't have them for long. In no time at all he was charged with the crime of stealing from the charity and sentenced to eighteen months at a work camp for juveniles in the wasteland that is west Texas. Stanley was a victim of circumstances beyond his control, and it didn't help that he told an improbable, unbelievable story about the shoes falling out of the sky.

If you've ever been blamed for something you didn't do just because you were in the wrong place at the wrong time, you can understand how distraught Stanley felt.

Even his parents questioned whether or not he had stolen the shoes. But, have you ever done the right thing, the God-pleasing thing, and still been attacked because it was not the popular thing? That was Jeremiah's experience.

Jeremiah, a resident of the tribe of Benjamin, was called by God to speak His word of judgment upon Jerusalem. Now, not everything Jeremiah said was judgment, but because he condemned the leadership and the lifestyle of the elites of Judah, that's pretty much all they heard. And they didn't like it.

Through Jeremiah, God told the people of Judah and Jerusalem that kingdoms from the North were going to continually come and demand obedience from the people of Judah and Benjamin. God gave this reason in chapter 1, v.16: *"I will pronounce My judgments on My people because of their wickedness in forsaking Me, in burning incense to other gods, and in worshiping what their hands have made."*

Through Jeremiah, God recounted for them what He had done in bringing their ancestors out of Egypt, in bringing them to a fertile land. But then He pointed out that they defiled what He had given them and made the inheritance they had received into a detestable place because of their lifestyles.

And now Jeremiah feeling the effects of taking a stand for God and what God desired for His people. He's receiving intense pushback and condemnation for preaching what God wanted him to preach, for reminding the people that their lives were not pleasing to God because they weren't living for Him. V. 8: *"Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long."*

He tells them that God is going to deal with them because of their sin of forsaking Him. But they don't want to hear it. They believe they are God's people, and God won't let anything bad happen to them, even though He point blank tells them that they aren't and bad stuff is going to happen.

This is kind of like American's falling back on the belief that they are Christians just because someone in their family once was, just because they were baptized, even though they have never darkened a church door since, except maybe once in a while at Christmas and Easter.

This is frustrating for Jeremiah. Even his friends turn on him, waiting for him to say or do something that lets them get rid of him. Jeremiah doesn't really have anywhere to turn and no one to support him.

Jeremiah's faith experience is similar to that of many. It's not always rock solid, but when He thinks about it, reflects on what God has done for him, he does as V. 13 says; *Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy.*

In the Gospel for today, Jesus sends out his disciples to the surrounding countryside to tell others about Him. This is preparation for what they will be doing a few years down the road.

However, He tells them it's not going to be easy; in fact, it will be downright frustrating and dangerous. And, in V. 32-33 of Matt. 10, he gives a warning and a promise: *"Whoever acknowledges Me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven. But whoever disowns Me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven."*

Jeremiah hung in there. Things would go from bad to worse for him, but he never disowned God as His Savior. He had to do some unusual things to get God's message across, but he stuck to the message God had given him.

In V. 12 of our reading, Jeremiah asks God to show him His vengeance upon those who are the persecutors. God does this, showing Jeremiah the destruction that the godless nations that surrounded the Promised Land would receive.

But this destruction is also a metaphor for the salvation that Jesus would earn at the cross. He destroyed the power of sin, death, and the devil over our lives, the three great enemies of human beings.

In Romans 6 St. Paul reminds us that we because of what Jesus did for us we don't have any reason to be slaves to sin any longer. Paul knows that the Roman Christians are surrounded by a culture that abhors God. We know that the Roman emperors considered themselves to be gods. Some, however, believed that it was treason to worship any other god, especially the God of the Christians.

But that isn't all. The culture of the city of Rome was what the Bible calls and abomination. The murder of infants was common, pedophilia and adultery by men was

accepted as normal, whether heterosexual or homosexual, and death by suicide was considered an honorable thing to do among the elites of society.

Rome was not an easy place to live. Paul reminds the Christians that they have come out of slavery to that lifestyle into a life of righteousness in Christ. He reminds them that living in the grace of God doesn't mean that they can receive an increase in grace if they sin more.

He reminds them to thank God that through Christ He has freed them from sin and made them (and us) slaves to righteousness. For us that means our lives in Christ are different from the culture around us.

For us that means we might be misunderstood. For us it means that our lives might mirror the life of Jeremiah. Jesus reminds us in Matt. 10:28 that through faith in Him we don't have any eternal reason to be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

We are valuable to Him. In V. 30 & 31 Jesus reminds us that God knows exactly how many hairs we have left on our heads. Jesus reminds us that we are worth more than sparrows that live until God determines their lives come to an end.

So, because we are valuable to God, Paul encourages us in Romans 6 to use our bodies—our lives—as instruments of righteousness. Jeremiah did that. We can do that because, as Romans 6:22-23 says, *“[You] have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, [and] the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

May we, as we live in these trying times in US history, say what Jeremiah said: *V. 9—His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed I cannot. Amen.*

Now may the peace of God that passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

