

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity: August 2, 2020
“Who’s To Say?”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text this morning is our Old Testament reading, especially these words, “**Jeremiah 23:16 and 28.**”

Brothers and sisters in Christ, hear this correctly – this is not hate speech, this is love speech. I know this is not the same kind of love that you will find spoken in the world today. There are many agendas being pushed by many false prophets and all aimed at your destruction. In a world that preaches heavily the idea of openness, fairness, free speech and equality, what we find is that is not the case. The only openness is to their own agenda. The only fairness is how they design. The only speech allowed is that which pushes their own definitions of progress. The only equality is that which agrees with their position.

It is easy to sit here and point the finger out there, but then we hear the words of Jesus in Luke 13, “***Do you think that they were worse offenders...? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.***”¹ God cares for all people, including you. He genuinely cares about what you read, mark, learn and inwardly-digest. What many forget is just to whom Jeremiah is speaking; he was sent to the faithful. He was to proclaim God’s Word in its truth and purity to warn them. We still need to hear these warnings today. Why? Because the devil is not stupid. He knows just how to wrap up death in neat packages and hide behind words like choice and matter? Whose choice? Whose lives matter? Who gets to decide who is in or out?

One of the hardest things with which to wade through comes right from the devil’s name. Lucifer in Hebrew roughly means shining one. He goes by other names of course – Satan, which means adversary, and Devil, which means enemy, accuser, slanderer. He is good at what he does. He has had more practice than you. He was able to deceive your first parents, who were created perfect, innocent, and holy. How did he do it? The same way he does to you; casting shadows and doubt upon the word of God and filling your eyes with something your sinful nature desires.

¹ Luke 13:4-5

He doesn't come at us the way he is portrayed in the movies. It's not fire and brimstone with smoking pillars and red suits; it is much more subtle. He is crafty and this is why Christians are to be sober-minded. Those who corrupt and pervert God's Word almost always do not look or sound like evil incarnate. Quite the opposite; they are almost always very charismatic and inviting and popular. They are good at scratching the itching ears. They speak what people want to hear and are good at pandering to the crowds. These false prophets and false prophetesses are beloved by many, and can generate quite a following that will follow them to the ends of the earth.

Sadly, what is missing is the truth. Today we hear phrases like, "That's my truth," or, "that's your truth." If everyone has a different truth, how are you to know what is true and what is not? That is why the true prophets speak only THE TRUTH, which is only found in God's Word, as He never changes. Christian brothers and sisters, you and I, continually need to hear the truth, and here's the thing—truth hurts. Because it often stings, we often prefer the sweet balm of a lie over the cutting, biting bitterness of the Truth. The Truth means things have to change. The lie, however, means "not a problem; keep on doing what you're doing."

Why is God so angry here in Jeremiah? The false prophets that God is angry with aren't a bunch of pagan, demonic Baal-worshipping outsiders trying to lure Israel away from Yahweh. They aren't even preaching against the One True God. The false prophets believe that they are working for Yahweh. They believe that they are the only true carriers of His truth and proclaimers of His Word.

I realize the irony here, as I am standing here believing the same thing. I, like you, know Jesus' words, "***Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven.***"² For this reason, I urge you to stay in the Scriptures. Test the words I speak. Follow the advice of John, "***Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.***"³ Don't just listen to empty promises of false comfort and floating platitudes. Beware of those who give false comfort and dishonest assurance in God's name. Be in the Word so that you can discern the truth from a lie.

²Matthew 7:21

³ 1 John 4:1

Think about what is happening in our world today. The problem in Jeremiah was wrongly speaking God's comfort and approval to a situation that called for the condemnation of sin and the preaching of repentance. Scripture tells us very plainly that Israel was unfaithful, stiff-necked—that is stubborn; they were dead-set in their proud and sinful ways. If you were to ask them how they felt about the situation, I would bet dollars to donuts they would disagree with your assessment. In today's context, it would be blasted over the news, marched up and down the square, and you would be canceled for being a hater, a bigot, and a bully. Instead, the people would spin to you just how good of the people they really are. They have it right and everyone else is wrong. They are simply good people who love God and are doing His work.

To this people, Jeremiah is sent. He calls them to relook at their words and deeds according to the words of God—the actual words of God, and not their own made up versions or interpretations of what they want God to say. He calls them to repent, but that message hardly ever goes well. Why? Well, because, “After all, if I don't have a problem with what I am doing, why should God? He loves me. I love Him. He is ok with what I am doing, and if not, He is gracious and will forgive me anyways, so who cares?” The sinful nature is very comfortable in its own skin, and becomes rather offended when it is told to repent. “Besides,” it says, “it's not that bad. The real evil is happening out there with those people.” This is where the false prophets flourish, because it is really easy to say, “Yes. Look at how bad those people are. Don't be like them. You are fine. In fact, you are great!”

Rather than preaching the Truth of God's Word, both the Law and the Gospel, the false prophets (on their own, not sent by God) wrongly preach God's approval. This still happens today, doesn't it? Look at just how far we have progressed. If you listen to popular Christianity today, apparently God is now okay with same gender marriage, killing babies, euthanizing the elderly, disrespecting all authority, gossip, and slander.

How easy for the sinful nature to convince itself, “Well, God can be angry at a particular sin when others do it, but He's ok with me, because He understands me. It's different with me. It's different with my loved ones. After all, He knows my heart. He knows I love Jesus.”

Brothers and sisters, pick your poison. Which commandments tempt you the most? We can look out there at them, but first and foremost is here, in here, at me. Cursing your neighbor? Blowing off church? Despising God's Word and Sacraments because of whatever? Even during this pandemic time, for those that are not comfortable coming or if it is unsafe to come, there is still opportunity through the printed word and podcast to continue sitting at the feet of Jesus Word. Dishonoring parents, pastors, government leaders? Physical violence? Hatred of your neighbor? Shacking up outside of marriage, which includes both pre-marital and extra-marital activities? Pornography? Stealing? Borrowing without asking or returning? Lies? Manipulative speech? Hateful speech? Hurtful words? Coveting? Denying Christ's real presence in His means of grace? Choosing a church, not because the Word is rightly taught and the sacraments rightly administered in accordance with God's Word, but simply because of the cool worldly things that fill their space. Sure, they don't give Christ's true body and blood, as He commanded, but at least the kids are having fun. Isn't that all that matters? "At least they're in church somewhere, right?" Any of that sound familiar, O false prophet?

Again, the problem here is preaching of false comfort. Such a poisonous message is quite evident in the false gospel of works-righteousness; the false gospel that gives people the false comfort that they can right their wrongs and they can achieve atonement, which is at-one-ment, with God if they work hard enough or live clean enough. They can win God over with enough money, enough good intentions and good deeds and personal sacrifices. This was true in Jeremiah's time. This was true in Jesus' time, and it's true today in our time—even among us good old Lutherans.

Don't believe me? This is what passes for your average funeral sermon today, regardless of what denomination you claim as your own. The message, time and time again, is a message of works. We "celebrate the life" of the deceased, seeking peace in the remembrance of how good they were. I've heard with my own ears a pastor give the false comfort from the pulpit that "heaven is now a better place" because the deceased was now there. That's how good of person he was! He actually made heaven better!

No mention of Christ or His sacrifice. No mention of salvation through faith alone in God's grace alone, which God shows to us poor, miserable, undeserving sinners only because of the all-redeeming work and person of Christ alone. Nope. It was all about the guy in the casket and how good of guy he was. The grieving people were sent away with the "peace and assurance" that heaven is now brighter and better because the guy in the coffin was now gracing it with his presence.

That, my friends, is false comfort. Such works-righteous false comfort robs Christ of His cross, His glory, and His all-redeeming sacrifice. Such false comfort essentially calls Jesus a liar. He declares victoriously, "It is finished," and the works-righteous corpse dares to say, "Yeah...not so fast. I still need to do my part, and THEN it will be finished. You did your part, Jesus, and now I need to do mine."

What does wheat have to do with weeds? It is easier to now read Jeremiah and I understand why God is so angry at such false comfort. Which is it? Salvation through faith alone in God's grace alone because of Christ alone, or is it salvation through good works and good intentions with a side-helping of Jesus' blood and God's grace sprinkled in for good measure? Or does it even matter? Is it simply six on one hand and half-a-dozen on the other? We all love Jesus. Right?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, doctrine matters. God's Word matters. His truth matters. It is the only source for practice, for life as a Christian. Without its truth and purity, your practice is blindly running into walls. Here is the bitter truth, and you may not like it—you are a poor, miserable sinner who deserves nothing but temporal and eternal punishment; so am I. Sin put Jesus on that cross...the sin of the world, the sin of the people you don't like, my sin, and—yes—even your sin. That's how great and damnable your sins are—God had to die for them! God knows your heart and for your eternal sake, He sent His Son. Jesus died for you, because there is NOTHING you could possibly do to make atonement for even one of them, let alone an eternity's worth of them.

This is the good news! The Truth, the Prophet Himself, hated no one. He spoke only the truth in love. He opened His gracious hands to all, and for the whole world had His opened hands nailed to the cross. For you, the truly Innocent One, knew unfairness.

When He was reviled and falsely charged, He did not revile in return or open His mouth in slander or hatred. Instead, He unfairly cried out to the One True God, “Father, forgive them.” In true equality, all the sins of all mankind were upon Jesus and He died for them all. The worldly distinctions that we make based on skin-color, or vocation, or hair-color, or bank account, or vehicle type are not just silly, they are wicked. All lives matter, young and old, all race and clan, as all are under the same condemnation of sin, and have all been purchased by the blood of Christ crucified on the cross. This does not take away the struggle and the plight of various races, and I recognize there is a struggle for many for all people, on all sides of these various issues today, what is needed is repentance back to this great equalizer (the Cross).

The devil wraps up death in life; Jesus wraps up life in death. Through His death all forgiveness is paid. When the adversary tempts you to be an enemy of God, when something looks full of light, recall the truth of God’s Word. Ask questions first. Seek first the kingdom of God. Jesus did it all! There is nothing left for you to do for your salvation. You are free to live as a Child of God. You are free to love and serve your neighbors. You are free to forgive them when they sin against you. If God is for you, who can be against you?

When you sin, repent? If you have been deceived away from God, repent. Here He stands for you. Come and see, here on this cross. Receive in the hearing of His Word and see in baptism and in the Lord’s Supper the sweetest comfort and peace you will ever know. Your sins have been paid for in full with the shed blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ Himself. In this life we proclaim as we sing,

“The words which absolution give Are His who died that we might live;
The minister whom Christ has sent Is but His humble instrument.

When ministers lay on their hands, Absolved by Christ the sinner stands;
He who by grace the Word believes The purchase of His blood receives.”⁴ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

⁴ “As Surely as I Live,” God Said, LSB 614:5-6

Prayer of the Church

Eighth Sunday after Trinity: 2 August 2020

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. For all baptized believers, that they would think on the steadfast love of God and praise Him for the salvation they have through Jesus Christ, which they receive in His Holy Word and Sacraments, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For faithfulness to God's Holy Word among the pastors called to preach and teach it, that false doctrine would be recognized and rebuked, and pure doctrine would be taught and received for the edification of all who hear, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For an increase in faithful church workers, that the Good News of Christ's perfect life, sacrificial death, victorious resurrection, and glorious ascension would be proclaimed in all parts of the world, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the Holy Spirit to turn the hearts of all false prophets and false believers, that they would be led to repentance and faith, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all life from the womb to the grave, that it would be cherished and protected, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For humility among the faithful, that they would interact with the world as sinners who have been redeemed by Christ the crucified, not out of pride or arrogance, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who have been placed in authority over us, that they would steer clear of self-promotion and focus on the common welfare of all, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who serve in the armed forces and police personnel, that God would stretch out His almighty arm to strengthen and protect them, that He would support them in these troubled times, and keep them in peace and safety serving with integrity and honor, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those whom God has granted another year of earthly life especially His servants, *Ken, P.J., Kevin, & Sophia*; that God would send His holy angels to guard and keep His children; that they may thank and praise Him for the gift of life and for the protection and care He has provided; that God would grant them to grow in grace, continue to know His loving-kindness, abide in the confession of His care and protection, serve Him faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of His joys in heaven; let us pray to the Lord: **Lord have mercy.**

For the joy and blessings that God has granted *Marvin & Ruth, Ken & Jan, and Tim & Pam* during the years of their marriage; that God would assist them always by His grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards Him and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that He have promised; let us pray to the Lord: **Lord have mercy.**

For those affected during this time of pandemic in body, mind, or spirit, for the sick and suffering, for the shut-in, and for all who desire our prayers, [*especially Carmen, Susan, Zoey, Marvin, Diana, and those we name in our hearts,*] that God would grant them relief and comfort according to His will, and that all medical personal and emergency services would be sustained and strengthened in their labors, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who receive the Holy Supper of Christ's true body and blood this day, that they would receive the forgiveness of all their sins and be filled with His life and peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the faithful who have gone before us and now rest in Jesus, let us give thanks to the Lord; that we would, by God's grace, remain steadfast in the faith until we are brought to join them in the feast that never ends, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**