

The Eighteenth Sunday of Pentecost

September 27, 2015

**Prayer of the Day:** Lord God, you call us to work in your kingdom and leave no one standing idle. Help us to order our lives by your wisdom and to serve you in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Verse of the Day:** Alleluia! My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Alleluia! (2 Corinthians 12:9).

**Sermon Text:** Jeremiah 11:18-20

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<sup>18</sup> Because the LORD revealed their plot to me, I knew it, for at that time he showed me what they were doing. <sup>19</sup> I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; I did not realize that they had plotted against me, saying,

“Let us destroy the tree and its fruit;  
let us cut him off from the land of the living,  
that his name be remembered no more.”

<sup>20</sup> But, O LORD Almighty, you who judge righteously  
and test the heart and mind,  
let me see your vengeance upon them,  
for to you I have committed my cause.

Your hand holds the test results.

A MRI scan had picked up an abnormal growth. So, you sent those results to the lab for second opinion, but now those results are back and your worst fears are confirmed: that mass is still growing. Your mind automatically flips through your medical books— and you know this aggressive mass will need some aggressive treatment. Six weeks of chemotherapy are needed, followed by four weeks of radiation; after that, multiple surgeries, blood transfusions, and physical therapy.

Perhaps the most difficult matter about the results is not *what* it is, but rather with *whom* you must share the news. Your patient, an innocent-looking six-year old, freckled, blue-eyed boy, is on an observation bed waiting for you. His mother’s arms wrap him up; his father nervously paces the room. You are standing on the other side of that exam-room door with that cancerous news. What do you say?

Let me ask you this: what would be *easier* to say? That this little boy has cancer and the treatments will beat his body to pieces— but by the end of these exhausting treatments he will be better? Or would it be easier to say that he just suffers from a temporary illness and it will pass over soon?

The good-sounding news would be easier to share, right? Most likely the parents and child will want to hear good news. Good news will make them feel better; good news will put their minds at ease. If you shared the truthful news, it could mean that the parents yell at you, call you terrible names, barge out of the room to find a new doctor. It would be so much easier to share good news— no matter how untruthful it might be. Yet, does it really help that child to ignore the truth— no matter how painfully helpful the truth is?

You might not be a doctor, but you have probably found yourself standing at a similar crossroads. There you met a person stuck in sin and you wonder what to say— if anything. Do you tell them that regardless of what they believe or do that that God is pleased with them? Or you tell them the truth: to turn away from sin leads to life with God?

What do you say? Jeremiah asked that. He already was a prophet. He had words he always shared. Now, God is speaking to him, giving him an entirely new audience, *appoint[ing him] as a prophet to the nations*" ([Jeremiah 1:5](#)).

Jeremiah's response? "God, I do not know what to say!" ([1:6](#)). The crowd is bigger, it is different; the crowd has people who are religious and those who are not. Perhaps his greatest fear is that he must speak to his fellow citizens of Judah. God's message will most certainly make him stick out. "*See, today [God] appoint[s him] over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant*" ([1:10](#)).

See, Jeremiah's fellow-citizens worshipped all sorts of little gods. Things made out of wood, made out of stone, overlaid with gold, little shrines set up throughout the countryside. Many would wake up, go outside, and ask a special rock for safety throughout the day. Others walked up to a certain tree, bowed down to it, asking for blessings on their day. Still others clutched little figurines, pleading for the ability to have children.

At first, God's message sounds good, easy to speak. I mean, God said that if the people repent, they will be forgiven. If they remained stubborn and did not repent, their nation would be destroyed, they would be taken away from their land and carried off to an entirely new country. So, God's message really does not sound too bad. If Jeremiah just goes out and holds these promises of building and planting and establishing, how could Judah not listen to God?

So, Jeremiah preached. He spoke everything God gave him. How do you think those people responded? Well, God reveals their thoughts: **Because the LORD revealed their plot to me, I knew it, for at that time he showed me what they were doing. I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; I did not realize that they had plotted against me, saying,**

**"Let us destroy the tree and its fruit;  
let us cut him off from the land of the living,  
that his name be remembered no more."**

You almost laugh at Jeremiah. How does he not know to expect this response? Of course he speaks from God, of course he is not making up these prophecies, but how could Jeremiah believe that the people would want to listen? He must be as naïve and innocent-thinking like a little lamb led to the impending slaughter!

After all, how many times have you walked in Jeremiah's sandals? That people hate your Bible-based words, that your classmates think all sorts of horrible thoughts about you, that your friends just want you to be quiet— so they either avoid talking about the Bible topic or avoid talking to you altogether?

That is the response you almost always expect nowadays, is it not? You can meet people who seem to already have their minds made up on what they want to believe is right and true. Some tell you how little they care about what God thinks is important [for their life]. Others listen and then call you superstitiously stupid or hateful for speaking against their lifestyle, inflexible for not embracing the world's changes. It really seems like no one wants to listen to God at all—even if it comes from your mouth.

So, it seems easier to say nothing at all in order to avoid those sensitive, so-called controversial issues, right? It is easier to keep your mouth shut and hope no one asks you anything so that you are not outnumbered in defending your beliefs.

Might there be a deeper reason as to why it is not easy to share God's truthful Word with today's sin-sick world? Might we invest more effort into protecting our own reputation, our own pride, our own feelings—even if that means not speaking God's truthful diagnosis to those who dearly need it?

Yes, it is by no means pleasant to have people mock or ridicule or laugh at or insult you. Yet, what is the reason that we speak God's truthful Word— as painful as it might sound to others? What moves Jeremiah to speak God's truthful words? Why preach about destruction and captivity and forgiveness? Because Jeremiah hates people? Because he wants them to go home, feeling miserable about their lives? Because he is angry they do not attend his temple, his church? No! He honestly wanted nothing more than for them to repent and have life with God! ([Jeremiah 8:21-9:1](#))

See, Jeremiah is motivated by the same love God richly showed you. A Savior from sin is coming. This Savior would come and take his place under God's terrible punishment. This Savior would come, be perfection, and then give him that same perfection, so that he would know for sure that eternal life is his.

When Jesus is finally born, you see the love of God, the love to which Jeremiah clings. In our gospel reading, you see the great plans the disciples had in mind for Jesus. They wanted to make Jesus a king. People would bow down to him. They would give him a nation with boundaries. They would want to follow him. Naturally, the disciples would argue about who was the greatest ([Mark 9:34](#)) because someone had to be a vice-king!

Yet, what does Jesus talk about instead? He does not issue the kingly decrees the people want to hear, does he? Instead he reveals the truth people need to hear— even when that truth is anything but popular. He brings up the cross again, that object of shame ([Mark 9:31](#)). He goes there, not to receive praise, but to receive your sentence for protecting yourself at the expense of the Word.

Is that not love? That Jesus deals with hell itself so that you do not have to? Of course it is love! Yes, people do bristle at the thought of being born dead in sin, unable to work their way into heaven, unable to choose to receive God's love. Yet, that is the truth you and I needed to hear. That we are by nature sinful, that we have disobeyed God, and that we deserve only his wrath and anger— but that Jesus willingly dies in your place.

That truth gets even better! Jesus rises again and declares you forgiven! Because he is not ashamed of the Word of God to the point of death, he washes away all of your sins,

marking you as his dear child, making you his very own. Yes, Jesus lovingly speaks this truth to you! You know that your Jesus has given you heaven!

Still, you know very well that while you believe this Word, it does not mean that others will gladly listen to you. Even St. Paul writes to Pastor Timothy: *...everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...* ([2 Timothy 3:12](#)).

Who wants to hear that? That you, because you believe God's good news, you will suffer. Why bother sharing God's truth then? Well, let me ask you this: If your toddler gets his hands on a bottle of bleach, pulls off the lid, what will you do? He really wants to drink it— I am sure of that. He is going to cry when you take the bottle away. So, why not let him drink? You cannot because that bleach is going to kill him, right? The loving thing to do is to remove that poison from him, to save his life—even if that means he yells at you for a while.

If your [friend/child/spouse] honestly sees no reason to ever learn about God— that there is absolutely no reason behind worship, that there is absolutely no reason to have this living and active faith, that he hopes he has a pleasant life after death, what do you do? He is really set in his ways; after all, he has been living his life for years without God. He will probably snap back at you if you tell him this life-saving truth. Why not let him believe what he wants? You cannot for one astronomical reason: Only Jesus can remove sin.

Are you not demonstrating sincere, genuine love by speaking God's truth to him? When you stand in front of that person and you are willing to tell them God's truth to the point that you are willing to endure trouble for it— it is evidence of love.

There is another reason you share God's truth: **You Never Speak the Truth Alone!** Jeremiah knew that. **O LORD Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.** Many ignored the message. The people of Judah hated Jeremiah so much that they threw him down a dried up well, leaving him to starve to death ([Jeremiah 38:1-13](#)). While greatly outnumbered, God remained with him.

You see, it never matters how many stand against you, because **YOU NEVER SPEAK THE TRUTH ALONE!** The people of Judah never turned from their sin. God allowed a bone-crushing army to swarm over the nation. Many who hated Jeremiah and hated God died, but Jeremiah was kept safe ([39:1-18](#)). You know, those men who wanted to erase Jeremiah's name forever—well, no one knows who those men were (other than they were from a city called Anathoth). More people know Jeremiah's name than their name. Most of all, God did not forget Jeremiah. He wrote down his name in the book of life and brought him safely to heaven.

Even though Jeremiah's preaching seemed useless— that no one wanted to listen— there was a little group that did. That little group of believers loved the Lord their God with all their hearts, minds, and souls.

Remember, God does not forget you as you speak. You do not go out into a world, sharing this life-saving truth all on your own. He constantly reminds you that he is with you, sending you out as his messenger, pouring out his words from your mouth.

So, go, share the words with your friends. Speak of the great things God tells you in his Word. Invite your friends and family to join you here in worship. Direct their hearts and minds on Jesus alone. Pray that God bless your efforts and bring in his results.

Go, speak that truthful Word— a Word which penetrates a sin-sick heart; a Word which brings healing life to all. Go, knowing that **YOU NEVER SPEAK THE TRUTH ALONE.**