

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

July 13, 2014

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Jeremiah 20:7-13

LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived ; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. 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. But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more 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. 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." But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonor will never be forgotten. 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. Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked. (NIV)

It is a day and age when holding to God's Word & speaking the truth brings ridicule and insults and name calling. It is time when even church leaders are telling half-truths, lies, and making statements saying "this is what God says," when this is not what God is saying at all. It is an age where more and more people refuse to listen to God's Word - an age when one who does speak God's truth is called unloving and intolerant. It is a time when love is lacking and evil is everywhere. It is a time of violence and immorality of every kind. Do you know what time period I am describing? You might think I am talking about this day and age for these things sound awfully familiar to the times in which we are living right now! But I am actually talking about the time when God's faithful prophet Jeremiah was called to serve in Judah around the years 620 to shortly after 586 B.C. Jeremiah was given the task of every prophet of God - to speak the Word of God. Jeremiah had the same responsibility that we as Christians are given today - to simply tell people what God says.

Yet, how could Jeremiah carry out this work in such conditions? Today, we are reminded it was not always easy. In fact, it was seldom easy. As a sinful man Jeremiah had thoughts of giving up, of remaining silent, and of flat out tossing in the towel. As a sinful man Jeremiah was filled with doubts, and fears, and even began to question the Lord and His plans for him. But thankfully the Lord proved once again to be stronger than all Jeremiah's weaknesses. The word that the Lord sent Jeremiah to speak was the same word that so often picked Jeremiah back up from the dust and restored him. The Lord remained faithful to His prophet and in turn Jeremiah continued to serve as God faithful prophet. So Jeremiah continued to speak the word. He would not hold back. He could not hold back for the word of God burned in him like a fire. I pray the same is true for us for we have been given the same word. We too have - **The Word that we cannot hold in!**

What would cause someone to speak such dramatic words as these? "*O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. 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. 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." What would cause any child of God, let alone the Lord's called prophet, to speak like this? For starters, the day before while Jeremiah was speaking God's Word in Jerusalem, he was taken and beaten. Then Jeremiah was held in stocks where all the people could see him and mock him. The one who did it to him should have been on the same team – this persecution came not from without but from within God's visible church. It was the chief officer of the temple who gave this order to beat Jeremiah and place him in stocks for the day.

But it wasn't just that Jeremiah had one bad day. Truth is, Jeremiah, for an awfully long time, had been having it rough. The message He brought from the Lord was continually rejected. God's Word wasn't just rejected by enemies. God's own kings and priests rejected it. God's own prophets changed it. One of Judah's kings even took the words of the scroll of Jeremiah, burned it, and threw the scraps into his personal firepot. Jeremiah was chased away, thrown into a pit, ridiculed, mocked, and plotted against. People were hanging on his every word, not to listen, but so that they could somehow twist his words and use them against him.

Perhaps now we can understand why Jeremiah cries: ***"O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. 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."*** Jeremiah did not sign up for this. It was the Lord who persuasively and powerfully called Jeremiah to be His spokesman. It was the Lord who sent Jeremiah out with His Word. It was the Lord who told Him to speak all these things. Now Jeremiah got more than he bargained for. Now Jeremiah was taking all the flack for it. Now Jeremiah was wondering what God was accomplishing through him. What good was the word doing?

Have we ever felt like this? Perhaps we have gone to fellow Christians in love to show them their fault as Matthew 18 asks of us, and all we got in return is anger and grief for it. Have we ever talked to people about the reality of hell? Try it sometime – it is not a real popular subject. Have you ever been frustrated and disappointed with the results of speaking the word of God to others? Have you been insulted or ridiculed for taking a stand on God's truth? There are people who want us to speak, not so they can listen, but because they want to trap us in our words. Have we like Jeremiah ever gotten more than we have bargained for or taken flack for our faith? In moments of weakness we might start to complain to God or doubt the power of His word. In the face of ridicule there is real temptation to stop speaking, to be quiet, to take our faith and cover it up like one might take a lamp and put it under a bowl.

But Jeremiah could not do that! Neither can we! For we have been given the very word of God – the Word that we cannot hold in! ***"But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more 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."*** Every time Jeremiah thinks about keeping quiet and no longer mentioning the name of the Lord, He says He cannot. The word of God burns like a fire in his heart. He can't hold it in. He has to speak the word. He has to tell people the truth about sin and God's coming judgment. They needed to hear about it. Jeremiah wanted them to realize what their sin has done so he could point them to the much needed promises of a Savior. He wanted them to understand the realities of hell so He could turn them back to a God who opens heaven for them. He wants them not just to hear about but to trust in the name of the Lord – the God of free and faithful love – the God who always keeps His Word.

This is why Jeremiah could always speak the word with confidence – the Lord always stand behind His Word. The Lord also goes with His messengers. Knowing this Jeremiah could say and sing these words: ***“The LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonor will never be forgotten. 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. Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.*”**

One of the things I really enjoy about Jeremiah is how much he reveals his true feelings. He is called the “weeping” prophet and we get to see his great struggles and tremendous range of emotions. He truly cared about the people. He has a heart for people much like the heart of our Savior. For Jesus too wept over Jerusalem and was willing to endure ridicule and insults all day long even from a cross in His saving love for people. That’s what really upset Jeremiah when others told lies or half-truths. His anger wasn’t to be vengeful against those who rejected him and stood against him. What made Jeremiah so sad so often was that His heart yearned to bring people back to the Lord! He wanted them to know their Savior-God. He wanted their eyes to be open to the Lord our Righteousness - the Savior who was coming. He wanted them to be with him on the side of the Lord who, as a mighty warrior, will in the end destroy all who oppose Him and His Word. He wanted them to have the peace of committing their cause to the Lord. He wanted others to experience the joy of singing praises to the Lord who rescues the life of the needy.

We have talked about the time of Jeremiah, but now I want us to look at our day and age. I’d like to point to a few numbers things that even Christians may be unlikely to know. Did you know it is estimated that 45.5 million of the 70 million Christians martyrs who have died for Christ, did so in the last century? In countries like Iran, Iraq, Egypt, and Indonesia Christians are often arrested, tortured, and imprisoned just for converting to Christianity. Did you also know that Christians are the most persecuted group in the world today, with the greatest number of victims? Don’t think because we live in a land where we are free that we are immune from ridicule, insults, or persecution. After all, Jesus reminds us ***“a student is not above his teacher”***.

So what can we learn from Jeremiah? Despite our time, we can’t be quiet or keep it in either. We have the good news, the message of forgiveness through Jesus Christ that every soul needs. We proclaim Jesus Christ as the Lord our righteousness. We will tell how Jesus poured out His blood and life on the cross to rescue all of us who were needy and dying because of our sins. We will declare how, like a mighty warrior, Jesus came out of His grave and proclaimed all of our enemies defeated. We will go, knowing that with God on our side no one can stand against us! We will not be ashamed of the gospel because it is and always will be the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Although it is seldom easy we will stand on and keep teaching God’s Word - the word that burns within us – the word that we cannot hold in. Amen.

