

The Second Sunday in Lent
February 24, 2013
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Jeremiah 26:8-15

But as soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the LORD had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, “You must die! Why do you prophesy in the LORD’s name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?” And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD. When the officials of Judah heard about these things, they went up from the royal palace to the house of the LORD and took their places at the entrance of the New Gate of the LORD’s house. Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and all the people, “This man should be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against this city. You have heard it with your own ears!” Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and all the people: “The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard. Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the LORD your God. Then the LORD will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you. As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing.”

“Don’t shoot the messenger!” This is an expression with which I’m sure we are all familiar. It is a phrase used to describe the act of lashing out against the blameless bearer of bad news. Some have said that this expression was first coined by Shakespeare in Henry IV part two, in Anthony and Cleopatra, when Anthony has married another woman Cleopatra threatens to take the messenger’s eyeballs and not do nice things with them. And there are actually true stories of messengers who have been shot, beheaded, poisoned, or killed in other ways all because people reacted very harshly to news they did not like to hear.

Whether or not the phrase, “Don’t shoot the messenger,” actually had its’ origins in Shakespeare, the truth about how many have angrily reacted to a message they do not like has gone back way before Shakespeare ever put a pen to paper. We see a messenger wrongly treated again today in this Word of God before us. In order to bring this message home I want each one of us to examine our own hearts and think about our own actions as we consider this question: **How do we react to God’s messengers?**

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you” (Luke 13). Our account is another example of the truth in Jesus’ lament. Our text takes place in the heart of the Holy Land – in Jerusalem. God sent His people Jeremiah. Jeremiah is indeed a prophet. He spoke God’s Word faithfully under good King Josiah. But now a new king is on the throne in Judah, King Jehoiakim. Very early in King Jehoiakim’s reign God sends Jeremiah to repeat a message he had been preaching. The news was not good. The people had rejected the Lord and His Word and God’s holy judgment was coming. God insisted Jeremiah go into the area of the temple where the most people would be and proclaim His message. God wanted no one to miss it. He also

told Jeremiah in words recorded in this chapter: ***“Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word.”***

This is what Jeremiah did. And the people in Jerusalem wanted to shoot the messenger. ***“As soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the LORD had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, “You must die!”*** Those who should have been most eager to hear the Word of God – the priests – the prophets - seemed to be leading the charge against God’s prophet. They said: ***“Why do you prophesy in the LORD’s name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?”*** That they will be like Shiloh might not mean that much to us, but to them it did. That was the city where the Ark of the Covenant and other precious things to the Israelites were taken and destroyed by the Philistines. It would be like if I walked into a place today and said this place will be like the twin towers of world trade center. Everyone would know what I meant. The message was clear that Jeremiah was saying Jerusalem would lie in ruins and the temple will be destroyed. And the people of Judah did not want to hear this to put it mildly!

So all the people crowd around Jeremiah in the house of the Lord, and then they take him in front of the officials. The mob scene now becomes more of a court scene. ***“Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and all the people, “This man should be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against this city. You have heard it with your own ears!”*** They say Jeremiah deserves to die. They don’t accuse him of being a false prophet. Instead, the charge is treason – blaspheme against Jerusalem and against the temple. They do not stop to take a good honest look at their own actions and sins. They don’t pause to consider if Jeremiah’s words have any validity. They have heard this all before and are sick of Jeremiah saying the same old thing about their idolatries and false worship so they want God’s messenger to die.

When it comes to speaking the truth of God’s message to people, I’ve seen the same thing. If you have faithfully proclaimed God’s Word to others you have too. I’m not just talking about the sinful world out there that rejects God’s Word and hates God’s messengers – those things are obvious and the examples are numerous. I’m talking even about Christian friends and family members. Have you ever had a family member get angry with you for telling them what God’s Word says about the sin of living together before marriage? Have you ever approached a Christian friend out of concern only to have that friend get mad at you and throw your words of concern back in your face?

While we may have experienced this, what I want us to consider today is not walking in Jeremiah’s shoes but that we put ourselves into the place of the people in Jerusalem. What happens when we are the ones being preached to about our sin and the punishment we deserve? How do we like it? Do we take such words to heart or do we want to shoot the messenger? On Sundays we have been studying the Book of Proverbs in which many proverbs speak about how it is wise to listen to God’s discipline and correction and foolish to reject it. Here is one we read last week: ***“Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid” (12).*** I have to admit that too many times I am guilty of being stupid. Whether it was my parents telling me things growing up, or even my own wife today, way too often my first reaction is too get angry at the messenger. Our sinful nature does not like to be corrected. It likes to fire back – it would rather shoot the messenger. How foolish this is - especially when the messenger is God’s messenger!

“Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and all the people: “The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard... As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing.” Jeremiah makes a couple of things clear. One is that the Lord sent him. If they had a problem with what he told them, then they need to take it up with God. He is just the messenger. Secondly, Jeremiah is in their hands and he will not back down because in truth the Lord sent him to speak all these words. So they can put him to death if they want, but Jeremiah warns them they will be guilty of shedding innocent blood. The Israelites understood that Moses spoke in Deuteronomy about shedding innocent blood as being a terrible crime. Thankfully, Jeremiah isn't put to death. Not here anyway. Cooler heads prevail and they decide not to shoot the messenger. They let Jeremiah live.

But if this is all we take from this account we miss the big picture. We then fail to notice why God sends messengers in the first place. ***“Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the LORD your God. Then the LORD will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you.”*** The Lord sends his messengers to people for one reason and one reason alone. He loves them. God wants all people to be saved and wants to one to perish. The Lord is seeking repentance and faith. The Lord wants to bring people back to Him – like a hen gathers her chicks and brings them safely back under the protection of her wings.

This is why God sent prophet after prophet to Jerusalem. This is why, after the people of Jerusalem beat, stoned, and even killed the prophets, God did the unthinkable – He sent them His Son. I can't read through this account of Jeremiah without my mind going to another messenger who stood in God's house and told people everything God wanted them to hear. These words take me to another time when priests and elders led a charge not against just a prophet but against the Christ. I picture the day the mob stood around Jesus not far from where Jeremiah once stood and I hear those cries: ***“Crucify, Crucify!”*** I am reminded of another court scene, of another false charge of treason & blasphemy, but in this one a cowardly governor washes his hands and let's the people be guilty of shedding innocent blood. We know that includes our guilt too. And yet you and I know that this innocent blood was shed because that is how much God loves us. That is the only way our rejections, our anger, our stupidity, and all our other sins could be taken away.

On the cross Jesus made payment for them all. And Jesus made good on His word for after they destroyed His temple, His body, He did build it again in three days just as He said. Because of this we are able to be sure that all His other words are good too. Words such as: *“your sins are forgiven, peace be with you, and I have preparing a place for you and will come back to take you to be with me.”*

Jesus still sends us God's messengers. God sends them out into all the world with His law and gospel because He wants all to hear it. As Jesus sends these messengers with His Word He tells them: ***“He who listen to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10).*** So how will we react to God's messengers the next time a messenger comes with news we don't really like to hear? Whether this messenger is your Pastor, or spouse, or parent, or friend, or even

none of these, I pray we take the time to examine the Word of God with them. I pray we listen. Remember why God sends them to you – because He loves you and doesn't want you to be lost. I pray the next time instead of wanting to shoot the messenger, we actually thank the messenger. Most of all, I pray we thank our God for the message. Thank the Lord who not only has sent us prophets, but has sent to us His Son to be our Savior. May we always listen to Him! Amen.