

Pastor Joe Polzin  
Jeremiah 28:5-9  
“The Prophet’s Peace”

Year A – Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 8)  
June 28, 2020

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Our Old Testament Reading from the book of Jeremiah today is actually a showdown of sorts, one that had been a long time in the making in Jeremiah’s career as a prophet. Jeremiah had always been in a literal life-or-death struggle with the false prophets of his day. He had faithfully proclaimed God’s Word, but more often than not, it was thrown right back in his face, often with the threat of death. Meanwhile, the king and the people usually welcomed the words of false prophets, and the soothing, feel-good lies these prophets decided to share.

But to truly understand the context of Jeremiah’s showdown, we have to remember that all this took place in one of the most intense time periods in the Old Testament. The people of Judah had already begun to experience the righteous judgment and wrath of God for their generational sin and idolatry, their turning away from God and his Word. God was using the Babylonians as his servant to enact his justice, and King Nebuchadnezzar had already taken the first wave of exiles out of Jerusalem to Babylon.

And in the chapter right before our Old Testament Reading, very dramatically, God told Jeremiah to put a yoke-bar physically across his own neck (27:2) and begin telling everyone that unless they submit to the yoke of the king of Babylon, they would not survive (27:6, 8, 12). If they did not heed God’s Word, and refused to submit, then they would be subject to “sword, famine, and pestilence” (27:13), not to mention 70 years of captivity in Babylon. God’s people needed to repent of their sin, turn from their evil ways, and trust in God.

But one of the false prophets named Hananiah announced in the temple one day that Jeremiah was wrong, that God would break the yoke of Babylon, and that everything was going to be just fine. He promised that God would bring back all the vessels of the temple that were carried off to Babylon, as well as every single person in exile, all within two years.

Hananiah was preaching a message that everything was fine, and would be easy, and would be taken care of, all very shortly. In an equally dramatic fashion, Hananiah walks over to Jeremiah, takes the yoke-bar off his neck, and smashes it to pieces, saying, “Thus says the Lord: even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within two years” (28:11).

And that’s where our Old Testament Reading takes place. Jeremiah says, “Amen!” *I wish it were true, Hananiah!* “May the Lord do so; may the Lord make the words that you have prophesied come true.” Yes, it would be simpler if there could be cheap grace without repentance, easy victory without suffering, happy resurrection without the cross.

And yet, Jeremiah reminds him and everyone listening that the true prophets of God from ancient times often had to deliver bad news, prophesying war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. The real test of the prophet, however, the way you knew whether God had sent that prophet or not, is to see whether the thing he prophesies actually happens (28:8-9).

Hananiah preached peace and restoration within two years. But the Lord hadn’t sent him, and so his promises were lies. Jeremiah’s message, the real Word from God, was totally

different, and much more difficult. God wasn't promising victory to Judah, but rather to Babylon. God was using Nebuchadnezzar as a means for his own judgment. Instead of a quick and happy ending, the people had better settle in for a long, uncomfortable exile that would last seventy years; they would have to build houses, plant gardens, have children, and raise families, all in a foreign land.

It was a sobering message during a sobering time in history. And I suppose that might be the first thing we learn from this text. It may be helpful for us to realize, in our own sobering time, that God's people have often lived through times of great hardship, where their homes, their cities, their worlds have all literally come crashing down around them. God doesn't always promise peace and comfort. Sometimes, God chooses to work through trials and suffering.

Jeremiah told the people to stop placing their trust in themselves, or in the walls around Jerusalem, or in the temple, or in the soothing empty promises of false prophets. Today, we should not to place our trust in the things of this world, either. Hoping in politicians, or political parties, or scientists, or vaccines, or our own worldly efforts, to the point where our security and even the hope of our salvation are all staked on them instead of on God, well, it will only leave us in a world of hurt. There are even times when God allows for war, famine, and pestilence as a sign of judgment against the things in which we falsely place our trust.

Instead, we must place our trust in God. God was the only one who was going to preserve Judah through the time of their exile and save them. And God was faithful to his exiled remnant, even when they had not been faithful to him. He had Jeremiah write to the exiles in the very next chapter that famous verse that most of you have probably heard before: "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (29:11).

Think about hearing those words while you sat apart from home and family, captive in a foreign country. How easy would they be to believe? How easy is it for us to believe, as we sit in church in a way that is very foreign for us and may even make us a little uncomfortable, watching everything that's going on in the world today?

And yet for exiled Judah, that Word was absolutely true, because God said it. He brought the exiles back home after 70 years, and reminded them of his promise to send them a Savior; all they had to do was wait on him. And so, we also see, because our trust is *not* in the things of this world, but in God, even when our days seem so odd and troubling, we know that God will see us through. All we have to do, all we *can* do, is wait on him.

The second thing we learn from this text is regarding Jeremiah's struggle against the false prophets. Jeremiah says a prophet will be judged by what he says, if it comes to pass or not. Hananiah was speaking lies, but it was what exactly what the people wanted to hear. Jeremiah was calling the people to a way that was difficult and full of repentance, which was *not* what they wanted to hear. And they rejected Jeremiah, and therefore rejected God.

But God's Word is always true, and we need to hear it, even when we don't want to. It's our sinful human nature to only want to hear what will make us happy and comfortable. People today flock to churches where they receive a very inspirational pep talk every week, but very little is ever said about repentance, or sin, or the forgiveness of sins, or why they need Jesus. It's the same reason why Hananiah's message was popular in Judah. But God isn't content leaving us comfortable in our sin. Making you happy and comfortable is not the loving thing for God to do. Sometimes, God's Word makes us terribly uncomfortable because his Law is confronting our sin.

It's like what Jesus says in our Gospel Reading, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). Of course, we know Christ brings peace through reconciliation, reconciliation between us and God and between us and fellow Christians. But what Jesus is saying here is that before there can be reconciliation, there has to be an honest examination of one's own sin. The sword of the Law first has to do its work so that, as contrite sinners, we may then receive his forgiveness. But often, confessing our sin makes us uncomfortable, and so our sinful nature resists it.

When you're confronted with your sin, you have a choice. You can get upset at God or the fellow Christian who is relaying God's Word to you, because you don't appreciate being called a sinner. And you can find plenty of false prophets in this world who will assure you that you're fine just the way you are, that God doesn't mind your sin, and that you don't need to change or ask for forgiveness. Or you can choose to acknowledge your sin, before God and others, and repent so that you may receive God's free gift of grace and mercy.

This was the choice Jeremiah was placing before Judah, and it's the same call to repentance we hear each and every week. God's Word cuts to our heart like a sword, revealing who we truly are: poor, miserable sinners. But then, upon our confession, God's Word also delivers the healing message of the Gospel, the news that God loves and forgives poor, miserable sinners like us, so that we may be reconciled to him, and not only today, but for eternity.

God punished the sins of Judah, and that's why God sent Babylon, in his righteous judgment. But in exile, Judah repented, and God was faithful to deliver his Gospel to them, and he pointed them forward to the Savior who was coming. And we know who the Savior is, God's own Son, Jesus Christ. He was born to that remnant of Judah, and given as a gift to the whole world. He came to save us not from political exile, but from the exile caused by our sin. And God's eternal punishment was taken away from us, and laid upon Jesus at the cross, so that we didn't have to endure it. And in its place, God gives us his unconditional mercy and grace.

Faith in Jesus means you don't have to shrink back when you are convicted in your sins, or feel angry toward God. Faith in Jesus means you can approach God humbly and honestly, believing that as you confess your sins to him, they are forgiven on account of your Savior, Jesus. That Christ's righteousness has already been won and given to you in your Baptism, and is delivered to you once again, here, in the Lord's Supper.

Remember when Jeremiah said, "As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet" (28:9). Well, the greatest of all prophets has come, and he has not only prophesied peace between you and God, but has gone out and accomplished it for you. Peace *has* come to pass, through Christ's death and resurrection, so that you may believe it and trust it.

Therefore, even in this tumultuous time, even when our world seems to be completely incapable of finding any kind of peace, even if in your short life you know only suffering, you may know for certain that the Lord has sent his Prophet, his Son, the Savior *for you*, and because of Jesus you now have true peace that will last for eternity. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**