

Jeremiah 20:7-13

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

June 25, 2023

“I’ve had it! I can’t take it any more. What’s the use? Nothing I try works.” Have you ever felt that way? Most of us have. Then you can identify with Jeremiah. A view of the full text shows a swing in emotions. How we feel depends on our focus. We learn with the prophet

GOD’S WORD CREATES CONFIDENCE

- I. It overcomes frustration
- II. It strengthens us for joyful service

We easily sense the frustration Jeremiah felt as he met opposition to the message he proclaimed. We all prefer to be liked. That was not in the cards for Jeremiah. God had told him that when he called him to serve as prophet. The people would not listen to him. He served during the time of the last six kings of Judah, the southern kingdom of God’s people after they divided. The Northern Kingdom was gone from the scene as the Assyrians had conquered them. Judah was going downhill. Conditions were getting worse. The nation had strayed into idolatry. Their hearts were hard. God’s corrective measure was looming: defeat by the Babylonians and seventy years of captivity there.

Jeremiah had sounded the warnings. He preached a stern message of law. The people didn’t like it. A priest by the name of Pashur was in charge of the temple and he had God’s prophet arrested, ordered him beaten and placed in the stocks. One’s head and hands, sometimes also feet were placed in boards. You can see some in tourist places especially in colonial states as the punishment still existed in our nation’s early history. I think we have a picture from a vacation of me in one. It can seem fun to pose in them but spending the night would not be enjoyable. The location where Jeremiah was placed was public so many could see and poke fun of him. The text mentioned insult and reproach. It was not fun for God’s spokesman. “I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me,” he lamented.

Even his friends (false ones) did so. “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.’” No one was on his side, or so it seemed. Jeremiah was grieving. When he was out doing his job, he sounded strong but in private he was ready to throw in the towel. He felt like giving up. He accused God of deceiving him. The Lord had not done so—he was honest about the difficulty of his calling, but that’s the way it seems when everything is going badly.

So Jeremiah tried his own plans to deal with it. He would stop preaching. Then he could avoid all the headaches and the hassle. But that didn't work. He felt even more miserable. He had a call from God and he knew the need of the people. "But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' his word is like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot." He couldn't stop; he couldn't keep God's Word inside. The message needed to get out. How else would the nation turn away from its sin?

Do you ever grow weary of serving the Lord or of sharing his Word? Parents have the task of bringing up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord. It is an important responsibility that God has given them. But kids aren't always eager to learn. "Do we have to go to church?" "Do we have to sit here for a devotion after supper? I want to get back to my video games!" "I don't like to do memory work. It's too hard." Or maybe your young adults are straying from the way you brought them up. "I want to live my own life. That church stuff worked for you but it's just not me. You need to keep up with the times." Sometimes the situation is reverse: the parents are not coming to church or living godly lives and the children are encouraging them, begging them to do right. We get tired of trying to convince those who are less than enthusiastic. "What's the use?" we wonder. We admonish the improper language or sinful lifestyle of acquaintances or co-workers. The ridicule grows stronger. Or we are challenged, "What business is it of yours? Who do you think you are?" Some may even quote the Bible about looking for a speck of dust in their eye while having a plank in your own. Or we are reminded not to judge. As a result, we become hesitant to speak. Even fellow church members can become defensive when we admonish sin. We feel frustration yet know the importance of rescuing souls from destruction. We think of the message God has given us to share.

II.

As we use that Word personally, we will find that it gives us confidence. As Jeremiah pondered the promise and performance of the Lord, a change took place inside. God's Word strengthens us for joyful service. The prophet recognized that God carries out justice. It's not all about you. It is God's Word and it is his battle. Jesus told his disciples when he sent them out on a preaching mission, "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me." He was the one who was wronged. He knew and would take care of the situation. Jeremiah prayed, "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." He was big enough to handle it. He operates as he sees best. His timing may differ from ours but his will is done.

“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.” There’s no question who is stronger. Jeremiah called God a “mighty warrior.” That designation is normally used for ruthless enemies. Here it is applied to God, which indicates he will unleash his fury on those who oppose him and his Word. Evil will not escape but meets God’s justice either in this life or at the eternal judgment.

The key phrase Jeremiah remembered was “not prevail.” When the Lord called him to serve as prophet to his wayward people he told Jeremiah of the opposition he would encounter but promised they would “not overcome” him (using the same word). The outcome was sure. God had spoken. He will do it. The call to his servants is to be faithful.

There is another verdict of God’s justice that gives needed encouragement. He forgives sin because of Jesus. His Son satisfied God’s justice. He lived a sinless life as he walked this earth in our footsteps as our substitute. He places credit for it on our account. Jesus died on the cross, suffering the penalty that met divine justice. He paid for every last one of our misdeeds, whether known or unknown, done in weakness or deliberately, whether open or hidden in the deepest recesses of the heart. We are holy in God’s sight. That was Jeremiah’s personal standing no matter what a court or popular opinion would say. He had that message to bring to people as well. His call was not just to uproot and to tear down but also to build and to plant. He had the gospel to share. That realization changed his viewpoint. False friends and mockers were ones to be reached with that saving message. He would continue to warn and then comfort penitent sinners with the gospel. Not all would repent, maybe not even most of his hearers, but God’s Word works and reaches souls to save them.

Praises resulted from that change in outlook. The text concluded, “Sing to the Lord! Give praise to the Lord! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.” Rejoice! Recognize the kind of God we have. Life is not so bad. In fact, with God it is good. He solves problems even when we can’t see the way out. Recall events like the crossing of the Red Sea. Pharaoh had finally given permission for the Israelites to leave Egypt for the Promised Land. Then he changed his mind again and chased after them with his army. Water stretched out in front of them. Mountains were on both sides and there came the army behind them. They were trapped. There was no way out. What did God do? He opened a path through the sea before them, allowing them to cross on dry ground and then

closed the waters on the Egyptian army, drowning them and ensuring the future safety of his people. Such events of the past reassure us and build our trust. They have been recorded for our learning.

Being strengthened through his reflection on God's Word, Jeremiah continued to serve. He did so not reluctantly or gloomily but confidently, gladly and eagerly.

That same unlimited power is with you as you serve, in whatever role God has placed you. Here is a message for all of God's people as we go about our daily tasks to glorify our Savior. Challenges will surely be present, but guided by God's power we will meet them successfully. The power that supports and protects you also converts rejecting hearts. Go with confidence, even with joy. Serve the Lord with worship and with your life. Let the rest up to God.

How do we experience this change from frustration to joyful service? From the message of the Lord. Use the Word personally. Cherish the gospel. Receive it visibly today in Holy Communion. You are forgiven and loved by God. A heart so touched will touch more. God strengthens us for joyful service.

His Word is realistic. It does not gloss over the realities of life and service to the Lord. Challenges and difficulties will come. The Word identifies the source of strength: the Lord himself is with us. Knowing his presence and power, we will avoid the valleys of frustration and despair. Stay in touch with the Lord and have confidence and joy as you follow your Savior's encouragement heard in today's Gospel reading to confess before the world your faith in Jesus Christ. Do so with boldness and with blessing from the Lord.