

**St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA**  
**✠ Second Sunday in Lent ✠**  
**March 4, 2007**

*Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe*

**“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! <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup>**

**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. <sup>11</sup> 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!” <sup>12</sup>**

**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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. <sup>15</sup> 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 26:8-15)**

Several years ago there was a little Lutheran boy who was over at his neighbor’s house on a Sunday afternoon. It was at the end of October and he was going home to go with his family to a Reformation service. As he was preparing to leave, his friend’s mother asked him, “What exactly is Reformation?” The timid little boy was stunned. He knew very well what Reformation was, but he also knew that these neighbors were Roman catholic. How would he explain that he was going to remember how Martin Luther, some 400 years ago, recognized the errors in the teachings of the church she is a member of? How would he explain that the official teachings of her church could be very dangerous to the Christian faith by leading people away from trust in Jesus and leading them to trust in their own works? And how would he say that to an adult? What do you do when you are asked to speak, but you know your answer might not be very popular?

The truth is, I’ve never been very proud of the answer I gave that night. But it was the first time that it really dawned on me that telling the truth is sometimes hard. I suspect that every one of us has some experience with this. The topic of conversation at work or home or school was this or that, and we know that God has something to say about this and that. But we also know that God’s answer is not going to be easy on the ears or the conscience and it’s not going to make us popular.

What do you do? Can you do a miracle like Moses that would confirm the truth? Probably not. Could you run the other way like Jonah? Or could you play dumb and pretend you know nothing at all, like Peter? Of course, we know what we should do. That’s what the apostle Paul wrote about in the 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson for today: Stand firm in the Lord. And Paul even tells us we can

follow his example as we do that. But still, it's not always so easy. We need help and encouragement and strength. And that is exactly why we turn to the Old Testament lesson for today. There we learn from the example of Jeremiah, who was perhaps the quintessential unpopular prophet of the Old Testament. What do we learn from him? When we're in these kind of situations – remember. Remember (first of all) that the warning of a prophet is the Lord's warning.

This wasn't the first time Jeremiah had warned the city of Jerusalem. Back in chapter 7, Jeremiah had spoken almost identical words. But some time had passed and here he was again. He was in Jerusalem, in the temple, and this is the message he had from the Lord: **If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, and if you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened), then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth.**"

Shiloh was the place where God had set up the tabernacle in the time of the judges, but God left Shiloh and abandoned it because of the people's disobedience and wickedness. Basically, Jeremiah was prophesying that the same thing was about to happen to Jerusalem. It was going to be defeated and the city and the temple were going to be deserted.

"No," they thought. "That can never happen. It's inconceivable that God would ever do such a thing or say such a thing." After all, Jerusalem was God's holy city and the Jews his chosen people. To speak against God's temple was like blasphemy and to prophesy against his people was like treason. There's no way (they thought) that God would ever say something like this.

Can't you just hear today's voices saying about the same thing? "I can't believe a loving God would actually send people to hell – if there is a hell. I can't believe you have such a narrow view of morality and how unaccepting you are of other people's lifestyles and living arrangements. I can't believe how strict, rigid you people are about having pure doctrine. I just can't believe that's what God says."

What do you say? Do you try to soften what God says or maybe just avoid the parts that might make someone uncomfortable? Do you say, "Well that's what it says, but what God really meant was this?" Do you apologize, and sort of wish that God hadn't been so clear about his will?

What does Jeremiah do? **"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!"** I don't think he left anything out. I don't think he sugar-coated anything. He simply declared, "This is what the Lord says."

It wasn't popular. But that's putting it mildly. It was downright dangerous for him to say those things. What gave Jeremiah the nerve, and confidence to speak the Lord's warning? It was just that. It was the *Lord's* warning. And because it was the Lord's warning, Jeremiah didn't need to become God's editor or publicist.

Even if they threatened to kill him. Even if they did kill him. It was the Lord's warning and Jeremiah could simply say to his accusers, **"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."**

Because the words of Scripture are God's, there simply is no room or need to edit them or to spin them. Even if the consequences are severe, and even if we are tempted to soften or edit or change the Lord's warning in the law; even if the one who thinks that God shouldn't have said what he did – even if that is us.

The truth is that the sinful nature in each of us fights against God's warning and all of his words just as much as the people of Jerusalem. We who from time to time are unpopular prophets – we're the ones who are ready to stone the prophets and kill those God has sent – because we just can't believe God could also be warning us.

So it's for us – as well as the people to whom we speak the Lord's warning – that we need to remember one more thing: our Lord's mourning.

Did you notice the sad tone in Jeremiah's words? **"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"** If only they would listen to him. If only they would change their ways. It's as if the Lord justly threatens punishment but at the same time mourns that same punishment. God doesn't want to destroy his people. No, he mourns over those who reject him and is quite willing to "relent." In fact, that is what he has wanted to do all along. And that is what God was planning to do.

The same Jerusalem that rejected Jeremiah and that one day would reject Jesus is the same Jerusalem over which Jesus stood and cried, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I have longed to gather you like a hen gathers her chicks." this is the same Jerusalem that Jesus marched towards – to save the people who would soon shout "Crucify him."

Our Lord mourns over those who sin against him and then proceeds to save them – even us. He mourns over us who sing, "Lord, you I love with all my heart" but then leave and find a dozen other things to occupy a more prominent place in that heart. He mourns over those who sing, "Forsake me not! I trust your Word" but then proceed to forsake that same Word anytime the calendar doesn't say Sunday. But we are the same ones he longs to gather together like a hen's baby chicks. We are the ones for whom Jesus marches on to Jerusalem. We are the ones for whom he died, and therefore, upon whom the Lord relents from his anger and declares, "Your sins are forgiven."

But it's not just our Lord who mourns. So do his prophets, his messengers. Jeremiah was even called the weeping prophet. He wept at Judah's rejection of the Lord's Word. And with tears in his eyes, the apostle Paul in the 2nd lesson tells the Phillipians about many who are enemies of the cross of Christ. And no doubt many tears have been shed by pastors of God's people when they see sin, apathy to the Word of God, anger and fighting among themselves and their families. It hurts them because they know the loving compassion and mercy of God. They see the Lord reaching out for them in love, longing to gather them in, but they are not willing.

You see, this attitude (that of a weeping prophet) is also the attitude that each one of us may have when we are called upon to speak. Our attitude towards those who reject or ignore the Word of God is not anger or self-righteousness. Rather, we simply remember our Lord's mourning and we also weep (figuratively) at their lack of faith and trust. We so want them to come to faith that it hurts us to know that though the Lord has promised them so much, they were not willing.

Our Lord's mourning (the fact that he wants all people to come to faith; to see their error, turn from their ways and live) is our whole reason for talking to them and caring for them in the first place. That is what gives us confidence to go forward in in the face of rejection and failure. It gives us the motivation to be God's prophet when the time comes, to say what God says, to do it honestly, but also lovingly.

I guess (almost by definition) a prophet is always unpopular. A prophet is someone who speaks for God – speaks for God something that people could not have figured out on their own. God

had to tell them. So at the very least a prophet's message is always unexpected and always needed. A prophet's message is not optional. Otherwise God wouldn't have said it.

So when you find yourself in a situation that calls for a prophet – for someone to give God's side of the story. Remember that. Remember that if you have to point out a sin, it is God's warning. And when you do point out sin (or when God's warning in his Word points out our own sin), remember that our Lord mourns for those who sin and he desires them to turn from sin. It might be unpopular. But thankfully for those to whom we speak and for us, it is the Lord's message, and through Jesus Christ, our Lord has mercy. Amen.