

'Ouch' The Truth Hurts! - Jeremiah 26:8-15

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who has brought us together".
Amen

The meditation from today Sunday Second of Lent is taken from Jeremiah 26:8-15. Let us hear God's Word.

⁸ And when Jeremiah had finished speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, then the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him, saying, "You shall die!" ⁹ Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, 'This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant'?" And all the people gathered around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.

¹⁰ When the officials of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the LORD and took their seat in the entry of the New Gate of the house of the LORD. ¹¹ Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and to all the people, "This man deserves the sentence of death, because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears."

¹² Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and all the people, saying, "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard. ¹³ Now therefore mend your ways and your deeds, and obey the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will relent of the disaster that he has pronounced against you. ¹⁴ But as for me, behold, I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you. ¹⁵ Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the LORD sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears."

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

The editor of a newspaper was accused of being a liar, because of the politically correct words and double-speak that he used. Tired of the accusations, he announced that he would tell the truth in the future. The next issue contained the following item: "Married--Miss Sylvan Rhodes and James Collins, last Saturday at the Baptist church, by the Rev. J. Gordon. The bride is a very ordinary town girl, who does not know any more about cooking than a jackrabbit, and never helped her mother three days in her life. She is not a beauty by any means and has a gait like a duck. The groom is an up-to-date loafer. He has been living off the old folks at home all his life and is now worth a damn. It will be a hard life for them."

Friends, no one I know would want to have that kind of truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth revealed about them. And, in fairness, we should note that the Bible says that we should speak the truth in love—a lesson many a husband has learned the hard way, when his wife asks what he thinks of her new hairstyle, or whether he thinks that her new outfit makes her look fat. But sometimes even the most loving people are going to have to speak a truth that hurts. It hurts when the doctor tells us that we have cancer, and that there is no treatment for us. It hurts when we hear that someone we love has died. It hurts to be told that we have failed a test at school, or that our actions and attitudes are creating difficulties in our relationships with other people.

People say that they want to know the truth—unless, of course, that truth points out something about us we do not want to hear. An old Turkish proverb says: *"If you speak the truth have a foot in the stirrup."*

The idea is that speaking the truth may bring resentment from people—and you may need to get away in a hurry. And the truth that hurts the most; the truth that we resist and deny the most, is the truth that says we are sinners who have wandered far from God's will for us. We do not want to hear negative things. We do not want to hear that our actions, our words, our choices are wrong and sinful in the sight of God. We want to hear happy things. We want to think happy thoughts. We want to acknowledge that everybody is basically good, and that everything is going to be all right. Well, happy thoughts do not change reality. And our misguided ideas of right and wrong do not replace God's absolute standards of truth.

As Jeremiah preaches to the people of Jerusalem today, he reminds us, too, that we need to hear the truth and respond to it with repentant hearts, so that we can receive the one thing that changes hurt into glory—and that is the forgiveness God

wants us to have through Jesus Christ. I find it interesting when people say that the Bible is not relevant to our lives today, that it was written so long ago that it is out of touch with the world of today. But our text today is just another indication to me of just how relevant the Bible truly is. The situation that led to the confrontation in our text today is a situation we still see in the world today. God sends Jeremiah to warn the people that judgement was coming unless they repented and turned from their evil ways.

God said in Jeremiah 26:2-6, which are the verses preceding our text: ***Stand in the courtyard of the LORD's house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the LORD. Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word. Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done. Say to them, 'This is what the LORD says: 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.***

Jeremiah does what God has commanded—and our text today told us how the people responded. They were angry with Jeremiah; angry that he should dare speak against them and against the Lord's house. They refused to believe that they needed to repent. Instead, they wanted to kill Jeremiah as a traitor and blasphemer, since he dared to speak against God's people and against the temple.

The truth hurt—but rather than accept the truth of the message, the priests and false prophets were determined to kill the messenger. It was only through the intervention of the civil officials, who recognize God has sent this man to proclaim this message, that Jeremiah was spared. Sadly, the people still did not heed his message. They did not repent of their sinfulness or change their ways. They continued in their unbelief—and, just as Jeremiah had predicted, the day of judgement did come. The beautiful temple was destroyed. The people of Judah were taken into captivity. The consequences of unbelief became very real.

Don't we see the same sort of thing happening in our day? The truth still hurts, as people react against the word of God—especially when they do not like what God has to say. The Bible specifically says that marriage is only between a male and female. Marriage between persons of the same sex are forbidden acts. But we are told we should be more understanding and forgiving.

When we proclaim God's truth that says a person is a person from the moment of conception, and that means that abortion is not a matter of choice, but a violation of the commandment, "You shall not kill", we are told that we are not being understanding of those who choose abortion rather than living with the consequences of an unwanted pregnancy. When we speak out against cohabitation, and the fact that people are not to live together without the sanctity of marriage, we are told that we are out of touch with the world.

Whenever God's Word speaks against sin in any form, our sinful hearts oppose that message. But they oppose it because the truth hurts. We do not want to change our ways. We do not want to give up our petty vices, or our sinful choices. We do not want to hear the truth, because the truth hurts!

The truth is that we are all sinful people. We have turned from God's will and God's way. And whether we agree with it or not, God will deal with the reality of our sin. He will punish us for our unbelief, unless we turn to Him. That is why Jeremiah's message is as relevant today as it ever was, because we need to hear and heed his call to repentance. That is one of the features of the Lenten season—a call to repentance. The truth is that we are sinners, and the truth hurts. But God does not want us to be victims of that truth. He says: ***As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?*** (Ezekiel 33:11)

God's love for us is so great, He does not want us to spend eternity in hell. Rather, He wants us to enjoy life with Him in His kingdom. But that cannot happen just by turning a blind eye to our sin. Sin is serious business in God's sight. Something

has to be done about sin, if we are to have hope for the future.

The purple paraments on the altar and the symbols on them remind us that the truth hurts. But they do it by reminding us of the One who is our hope; the One who was hurt because of the truth of our sin. In the gospel lesson, Jesus tells the disciples that they are going to Jerusalem so that He can reach His goal—the goal of giving Himself as a redeeming sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. The truth of our sin hurts Him, as He suffers under the burden of the cross, as He endures the punishment we deserve. He frees us from the condemning truth of our sin, so that we may live by faith under God's truth. He lives so that we may live in Him, who is the Way, the Truth and the life.

Back then Jeremiah proclaimed the truth—and people rejected it. God's truth is still proclaimed today in His holy word, and the people are rejecting it. Do we listen, even if the truth hurts? We can rejoice that Jesus has taken away our sin and given us life through faith in Him. As we trust in Him, we see and know the truth—but the truth is different. We are sinners, but we are forgiven sinners. God has saved us that we might live with Him. That truth does not hurt; it heals, and brings us to the wonderful glory of eternal life with God forevermore. Amen.