

February 27/28, 2010
St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran
Oconomowoc, Wisconsin

CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY
Jeremiah 26:8-15
"THE PROBLEM OF BEING RIGHT"
Pastor Ronald P. Krug
Second Sunday in Lent

Jeremiah 26:8-15
Philippians 3:17-4:1
St. Luke 13:31-35

ADVANCE THE MISSION - REACHING, SERVING AND GROWING DISCIPLES

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 PROPHECY 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 PROPHESED 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 PROPHECY 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." (Jeremiah 26:8-15 NIV)

Probably none of us have been in the situation in which Jeremiah finds himself in our text for today. He was sent by God to bring a message to the people of Israel. These are God's words from the early part of chapter 26: **"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 had a message of Law to bring to the people of Israel and they did not want to hear it. That is not unusual for sinful human beings. The same could be said of each of us at different times in our lives. Because of our sinful human nature, we do not always want to hear the message of God's Law in our lives. It's fine when it seems to be aimed at other people. Two individuals who were prone to gossiping were sitting in the pew one morning when the Pastor began to preach against those who committing adultery, cheating on their spouses. The two individuals said under their breath, "Give it to them, Preacher!" Then the Pastor began to speak against drinking and the abuse of alcohol in people's lives. The two individuals said under their breath, "Give it to them, Preacher! Then the Pastor began to speak of the evils of gossiping, of spreading rumors and untruths about others in the faith community. The two individuals thought to themselves, "Now you're meddling, Preacher!"

Jeremiah was right in bringing his message to the people of Israel, but they were not ready to hear his message and were ready to treat him badly for bringing it. Don't be surprised! They did the same thing to Jesus when He came with His message. If you and I are ready, willing and able by the power of the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus as His disciples, we must prepare for the same reaction from people that Jeremiah and Jesus received. It is our Christian responsibility to live and act like Jesus in our day to day lives and that just may open us up to the type of persecution that He and Jeremiah experienced. The problem of being right is that the world does not always welcome the right ways of God.

In the New Testament lesson for today St. Paul reminds us that there is power in the example that we can offer to one another and the world. A grave concern that I and many pastors share is how easily the people of God today can fall prey to the pattern of this world, to conform to the pattern of this world. We are inundated by all kinds of influences through the home, the media, the workplace, the school, the entertainment industry and the like. We do not always have the insight that St. Paul exhibits when he says **"...many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things."**

As Dave Ramsey said so plainly in that video we saw a few weeks ago, many people focus only on the stuff they can accumulate. Our stomachs not only desire food, but other earthly comforts as well. We also know how easy it is for people to boast about the way they live outside the will of God and glory in their rebellion against God. Many live their lives in relation to God like teenagers in relation to their parents, pushing the boundaries and seeking to be able to do anything they desire.

Our real place of residence, however, is not this earth. We are strangers and foreigners on this earth. Our real home is in heaven. That means that the things of this world do not hold the same value for us as they might for those whose residence is this earth. And even though we are right in viewing the things of this world as transitory and not of the same value as spiritual treasure, the people of the world will not see that perspective and they will consider us not to be in our right minds. They might ridicule us and they could even persecute us.

In the Gospel lesson we find Jesus being told by some Pharisees that Herod wants to kill Him. We don't know if the Pharisees are trying to warn Jesus or if they are gloating over the fact that Jesus has angered the Jewish puppet king over the land. That situation, however, gives Jesus a chance to express His deep grief over the way that the people of Jerusalem had not listened to His voice nor followed after Him. He uses the well-known metaphor of a hen and chicks to describe His deep desire to gather and protect His fellow Jews from spiritual destruction. He speaks with words that echo Jeremiah's message to that same city many years earlier. He calls Jerusalem "desolate."

You and I are well aware of the difference between right and wrong. Because we have a sinful human nature we are well aware of that which is wrong. Because we have the Holy Spirit within us, we have an awareness of what is right. We fight against the human nature and we yield to the Holy Spirit. The problem of being right, however, is that our lives do not always match up with our words or our beliefs. It is a constant battle to fight against the sinful human nature. St. Paul said that the good he knew that he should do, he did not do. The evil that he knew he should not do, he did all the time. Does that sound like your life and mine? Probably. We are saints and sinners, as well.

One of the best ways to make sure that our lives are lived in line with what the Word of God says is to be in Bible Study on a regular basis to learn what the Bible says about living life. You do not have to answer out loud, but consider these questions: Do you read your Bible on a regular basis by yourself? Do you read the Bible or some type of devotion with your spouse or family? Do you attend worship every weekend unless you are ill or have to work? Do you participate in an organized Bible Study either on Sunday morning, Wednesday evening or some other day in a Small Group setting? If your answer is "Yes!" to most of these questions, you probably have a good idea of what God desires in the way you live your life. If your answer is "No!" to most of these questions, you may not have a good idea and it would be helpful to become more active in God's Word. The more you know the Word, the easier it is to live the way God has called you to live, to live being right.

On a personal note, this is the last weekend that I shall be Interim Guiding Shepherd for St. Paul's. Beginning Monday, March 1st, I will return to my position as Outreach Shepherd. The past year has been a difficult one in many ways for me and my family. We had to deal with a personal tragedy in the death of our daughter, as well as two surgeries for my wife and one for me. As a parish we dealt with some difficult issues, the on-going Land Acquisition lawsuit, the change from Affirmation back to Confirmation, the resignation of many of the elected Church leaders. We had some very good times, as well, including the Journey to Christmas production and the Confirmation of ten of our High School students, as well as the reception of over 20 new members following the Fall Christianity 101 class.

I wish to express my deep appreciation for your prayers and your support throughout the interim period. I rejoice that Pastor Doug is back and will be the Guiding Shepherd for St. Paul's into its future and I pledge myself to fulfill my role as Outreach Shepherd to the best of my ability, so help me God. Amen.