

Second Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 6a)

Text: Jeremiah 20:7-13

⁷ O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. ⁸ Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. ⁹ But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. ¹⁰ I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side! Report him! Let's report him!" 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." ¹¹ But 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.

Theme: Mad at God?

Mad at God? It just doesn't seem right. In fact, it almost seems blasphemous for a Christian to be mad at the God who has given us everything that we have. But that is exactly how the prophet Jeremiah felt about God sometimes. The book of Jeremiah has 6 startling confessions of Jeremiah, which honestly show his inward struggles, including how he felt toward God sometimes. At the beginning of our text he cries out to God, "*O Lord, You deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed.*" He was angry at the lot that God had given him in life.

These confessions also teach us something about the times when we begin to feel mad at God in our own lives. They teach us to be honest with God and also show how He gives us new hope and peace in His help again.

I. What caused Jeremiah to feel this way?

Jeremiah was given the hardest job of any prophet. The prophets before Jeremiah were called to preach that if the people repented of their unbelief, God would relent and would not send His people into captivity. The Prophet Ezekiel who came right after Jeremiah was called to tell the people that God went with them as they went into captivity. But Jeremiah's call was different. He was called to tell the people that the Babylon would come, defeat Israel and destroy Jerusalem. Jeremiah's message is summarized in verse 8, "*Whenever I speak, I cry out violence and destruction. So the word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long.*" God was about to punish Israel for their sins. Jeremiah was God's chosen instrument to announce the coming destruction. He told the people that the best that they could do was to surrender soon, so that fewer lives would be lost. As the Babylonian army neared, Jeremiah was looked at as a traitor. Everyone from the highest to the lowest hated him, including the priests. The best news that Jeremiah could give the people was that in 70 years, the exiles would return, but by then everything would be destroyed, the Davidic dynasty would be gone, and almost everyone of that generation would be dead. To make things worse, there was probably no one at the time who loved the city of Jerusalem more than Jeremiah. The next book of the Bible is Lamentations, his personal lament over the destruction of his beloved

city.

Jeremiah didn't even want to be a prophet. When God called him in chapter 1, Jeremiah answered, *"Ah, Sovereign Lord," I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.*" (1:6) Jeremiah was about 20 years old when he was called. He didn't want to do the job, but God wouldn't take "no" for an answer. Even before Jeremiah was born, God had set him apart for this special purpose.

When Jeremiah preached, it would only get him into trouble, so sometimes he decided that he wasn't going to say another word. But that hurt even more. In verse 9 he complains, *"But if I say, 'I will not mention Him or speak any more in His name,' His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot."* God wouldn't let him shut his mouth. God made it so that it hurt Jeremiah more to hold God's Word in than to preach it.

Jeremiah's preaching caused the people to despise him. Because Jeremiah preached about the coming destruction with no possible escape, the people gave him a nickname. They called him, "Terror on every side." In verse 10 Jeremiah complains, *"I hear many whispering, 'Terror on Every Side, report him; let's report him.' All my friends are waiting for me to slip..."* Imagine that, even his friends were looking for his downfall. In chapter 10 the men of his hometown plotted to kill him, and his own family was ready to betray him into their hands (11:19, 12:6), but God revealed their plot to Jeremiah. At the beginning of chapter 20 he prophesied that the country would be destroyed. He smashed a pot, and said that the Lord would smash the country in the same way. After that even the priests turned against Jeremiah. When the priest Pashhur heard Jeremiah prophesying those things, he had Jeremiah beaten and put in stocks at the temple. Even while he was beaten, the prophet was brave. He was like a pillar that would not be bent. But when he returned home and was alone, he broke down. He opened his heart to God, and his heart was angry toward God.

Our true feelings might not be all that different sometimes. We look at the crosses that we have to bear and it angers us that the Lord has given us such a great burden. We become frustrated at some of the people who have burdened our lives. We might wonder why He gave us children who break our heart again and again. We might wonder why He gave us such stubborn parents. There might be other people in our lives who have been a burden since the day that we met. Sometimes we get angry because the Lord put such difficult people into our lives. Or we look at our temptations, and there are things that all of us struggle with. Sometimes we don't understand why God just doesn't take a certain temptation out of our lives. It becomes such a struggle that we are almost ready to give up in our battle against it. We look at what little we have compared with other people, and we feel sorry for ourselves. Then we look at our bodies, and we envy those who are healthier than we are. We begin to feel like Asaph who wrote in Psalm 73, *"I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man."* Like Jeremiah we want to complain, "Lord, the cross that you have given me to bear is just to big! It doesn't seem fair!"

III. But then Jeremiah teaches us to remember what God has done for us and to listen to God's Word for new strength and peace.

It's interesting how right in the middle of his complaint, Jeremiah begins to praise God. Jeremiah remembered, *"But the Lord is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and*

not prevail.” He remembered God’s promise at his call, *“Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land— against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you, but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you, ’ declares the Lord.”* Jeremiah remembered that promise, and then he looked back and saw how God was always with him and delivered him again and again. After thinking of God’s promises and remembering how God had helped him, he shouted, *“Sing to the Lord! Give praise to the Lord! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked!”*

The Lord gives us the same peace. There are times when we want to complain to God about our life. Like Jeremiah we might even be mad at God. It’s fine to be honest with God and to even share your anger with him. He’ll do the same thing with you that he did to Jeremiah. He will remind you of his word, words like, *“Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.”* He reminds us of His help in temptation, *“God is faithful, He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”* (1 Cor. 10:13) We think of God’s Word to St. Paul when he struggled with his thorn in the flesh, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.”* (2 Cor. 12:8) When our sins trouble us, we think of the words of St. John, *“The blood of Jesus [God’s Son] purifies us from all sin...If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins.”* (1 John 1:7,9) When we mourn, we remember Jesus’ promise that He is the resurrection and the life. When our cross seems to heavy to bear, we remember His words which invite us to come to Him when we are wearied and burdened, and He will give us rest. As if His words are not enough, in Holy Communion, He reminds us in a more personal way that His body was given for us, and His blood was shed for us.

Then Jesus helps us to look back in our lives, and we realize that His promises have been true. There have been many times when we were afraid, and He helped us in a way that we never expected. As we look back at past crosses, we see how He gave us the strength to bear them. He has guarded us in the hour of temptation and has forgiven us when we failed. He has comforted us when we mourned and have given us the hope of eternal life. When we think of God’s promises in the Scriptures and remember all that He has done for us, suddenly our lament turns to joy, and we can’t help but sing and praise the Lord who rescues the life of the needy.

So when you feel angry about your crosses or the lot that you have in life, don’t be afraid to bring your complaints and concerns to God in prayer. But be sure to listen to Him too. His Word will give you new hope and peace as you remember His promises and all that He has done for you.

Praise the Lord who does hear our prayers, and who rescues our lives from every evil.

Amen

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