

Sermon for July 9, 2017 - 5th Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 20:7-13 (Evangelical Heritage Version)

Theme: How a Christian Moves from Complaint to Confidence

- 1) Submit your cause to Christ.
- 2) Trust that He will do what he promises.

⁷You persuaded me, LORD, and I was persuaded. You are stronger than I am, and you prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long, and everyone mocks me. ⁸Whenever I speak, I call out. I call out, "Violence and destruction!" because the word of the LORD has brought me insult and mockery all day long. ⁹If I say, "I will not mention him or speak in his name any more," then there is a burning fire in my heart, shut up in my bones, and I am weary of holding it in. I cannot! ¹⁰I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side!" "Denounce him! Let's denounce him," say all my close friends, those who are watching for my fall. "Perhaps he will be persuaded, then we will prevail against him and we will take our revenge on him." ¹¹But the LORD is with me like a fearsome warrior. So my persecutors will stumble and they will not prevail. They will be utterly ashamed because they have failed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten. ¹²LORD of Armies, you who test the righteous, who see the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance on them, for I have revealed my cause to you. ¹³Sing to the LORD! Praise the LORD, for he has delivered the life of the needy from the grasp of the wicked.

Few things are worse than having a friend you are trying to help turn on you.

In Junior High School, I once had a friend who confided in me that he struggled with inappropriate thoughts. In my attempt to help him, I told him about temptations I struggled with, and the forgiveness and hope I have in Christ.

Guess what happen the next day I came to school: people started coming up to me and saying stuff like: "So I hear you struggle with impure thoughts" and then went on to laugh at me. As you can guess, my so-called "friend" told almost everyone at school what I told him. I was devastated. I mean, the only reason I "confessed" my sins to him was to encourage and bring him to Christ.

I am sure that many of you have experienced similar situations: where the very people you were trying to help repaid you with evil. Maybe they mocked you. Worse yet, maybe their slander ruined your reputation and got you into trouble.

Whenever something like this happens, not only do we feel betrayed by the person who hurt us, we might even feel betrayed by God. Why? Because - more often than not - we were trying to do his will when such things happen. How can a just God allow his followers to experience such injustice? "Why, LORD?" our souls cry out.

In most cases, the LORD never gives us the reason "why" he allows specific injustices in our lives. Instead he helps us endure them by reminding us of who he is and the justice he will bring about at the end of time. With the example of Jeremiah, let us consider: **How a Christian Moves from**

Complaint to Confidence. 1) *Submit your cause to Christ.* 2) *Trust that He will do what he promises.*

Part One: Submit your cause to Christ

In order to understand our sermon text, I should probably give you a little background information. The prophet Jeremiah (the speaker of our sermon text) lived in Jerusalem during Judah's last days as a nation. The Jews considered themselves to be the LORD's special covenant people. The problem is that they didn't actually keep God's covenant. They ignored many of his laws and became like the nations around them – even going so far as to adopt their practices and treat all gods on an equal plane with the LORD.

One way of picturing what Jerusalem was like back then is by thinking about liberal Christianity today – which teaches that it doesn't matter what God you believe in, so long as you believe in a god. Let me give you an example of what I mean: when I lived in Germany, the protestant state Church had a huge festival service, to which they invited prayers and worship not only from Christians from other denominations, but also Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Shamans and even self-professed witches – claiming that we worship the same god!

This type of Christianity is not only over in Europe. It's in our country as well. This is seen in the fact that almost every time a new government is installed our leaders feel compelled to invite representatives from all major religions to invoke "god" – being careful not to define who he is. This may seem good and pious, but it is – in fact – offensive to the one, true God, who says: *"I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols."*

The nation of Judah, was steeped in this kind of nationalistic worship of "god" – and the LORD hated it. He sent prophet after prophet to call them back to himself, but they would not listen. The time came for one final warning - and the LORD chose Jeremiah to give it.

Now understand that Jeremiah didn't choose this ministry for himself. No, the LORD appointed him with the all-important task of warning the people of the coming judgment so that they might repent. And, loving the people he served, Jeremiah faithfully carried out his ministry. Sadly, the people Jeremiah loved, didn't want to hear his message – just like faithless Christians today don't want to hear our call to repentance.

So what did the people do about Jeremiah's preaching? They tried to silence him by any means possible. For example, right before our sermon text, the Bible records how Jerusalem's temple warden had Jeremiah beaten and imprisoned for his preaching. Jeremiah was faithful to God, and what does he get in return for doing the good God commanded him to do? He's repaid evil by the very people he was trying to save.

The frustration and injustice of it all, led Jeremiah to pour out his heart to God, saying: *⁷You persuaded me, LORD, and I was persuaded. You are stronger than I am, and you prevailed.* That is to say: "I really didn't choose to be your prophet, but you chose me – compelling me to preach your word. But because of this word. . .

I have become a laughingstock all day long, and everyone mocks me. ⁸Whenever I speak, I call out. I call out, "Violence and destruction!" because the word of the LORD has brought me insult and mockery all day long.

Can you imagine what it was like for Jeremiah: tasked with telling his countrymen that Jerusalem would fall, God's temple would be destroyed and they would be taken captive? What a depressing message – one that no one wanted to hear; and yet it had to be preached. Could you imagine what it would be like if God commanded us to preach that message in America today? How many people would consider us kooks or, worse yet, traitors? If you can imagine that, then you can imagine how Jeremiah must have felt alone, abandoned and helpless as he warned the people of God's fast approaching judgment.

Jeremiah felt so weary that he considered putting a halt to all preaching activity. But even though his sinful nature wanted him to do this, God's message compelled him to continue. He said: ⁹*If I say, "I will not mention him or speak in his name any more," then there is a burning fire in my heart, shut up in my bones, and I am weary of holding it in. I cannot!*

And why did the message compel him to speak? Because he was convinced of the truth of what he spoke. He knew that his countrymen were in danger of dying – not just physically, but eternally as well. Yes, faith in God's Word and love for his countrymen compelled Jeremiah to preach – just as it compels us to share God's law and Gospel today: hoping that the people we love enough to witness to will repent and trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sin.

And so, Jeremiah continued preaching the message God gave him – with the result that even friends turned on him, as he himself says: ¹⁰*I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side!" "Denounce him! Let's denounce him," say all my close friends, those who are watching for my fall. "Perhaps he will be persuaded, then we will prevail against him and we will take our revenge on him."*

Yes, Jeremiah certainly had a rough time with what God wanted him to do. Seeing that his love and faithfulness was repaid with utter evil, we can sympathize with Jeremiah's complaint. But take note of how he complains: not accusing God of injustice, but simply laying before his merciful LORD what he is experiencing. Jeremiah feels utterly helpless. This is why he submits his cause to the LORD in prayer. Why? So that his faith might be strengthened as he remembers who God is and what he promised him. This gives him the strength to carry on in faith and hope – knowing that his ministry is not in vain.

Part Two: Trust that He will do what he promises.

Even though Jeremiah faced so much evil, he took confidence in the promise God gave him at the beginning of his ministry, by saying: ¹¹*But the LORD is with me like a fearsome warrior.*

Jeremiah's enemies may have looked tough and fearful, but they were no match for the LORD. Jeremiah knew that God was with him. Proof of this fact was that he wasn't killed – even though his enemies desired to rid the world of him.

Because the LORD was with him, Jeremiah could say with confidence: *So my persecutors will stumble and they will not prevail. They will be utterly ashamed because they have failed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten.*

With these words, Jeremiah confessed his confidence that God's will would be done. And what, exactly is God's will? In the Small Catechism, Luther tells us: "God's will is done when he breaks and defeats every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh, which try to prevent us from keeping God's name holy and letting his kingdom come. And God's will is done when he strengthens and keeps us firm in his Word and in the faith as long as we live. This is his good and gracious will."

In other words, despite how things looked, Jeremiah is confident that God will keep his promise and save the remnant of Jews that still believed in him. Why? Because of who God is. He prays: ¹²*LORD of Armies, you who test the righteous, who see the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance on them, for I have revealed my cause to you.*

There is only one eternal, almighty God of heaven and earth, and the LORD is his name. He searches and knows the heart of man. He could see into the hearts of all the priests and temple stewards in Jerusalem who claimed to follow the LORD, but actually did not. They would suffer God's vengeance for persecuting Jeremiah and all other faithful followers of the LORD.

But understand Jeremiah's words correctly: it is not that he wanted his enemies in hell. No – since Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world, believers would always rather that their enemies repent and be saved. But if they refuse to repent, then believers want God to defeat every evil plan and purpose that threaten them.

Jeremiah was confident that God would do this. Why? Because he promises to deliver his needy people: that is to say, God promises to deliver all who repent of their own sin and trust in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for their forgiveness. For this reason Jeremiah – in the midst of his complaint – could say: ¹³*Sing to the LORD! Praise the LORD, for he has delivered the life of the needy from the grasp of the wicked.* Yes, after submitting his cause to God, Jeremiah moved from complaint to confidence, because he trusted all the LORD promised him.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the LORD never promised Christians an easy life on this earth. Rather, he said: *In this world you will have trouble.*ⁱⁱ In other words we can expect times when people repay our kindness and concern for their eternal welfare with mocking, slander and hate. What should we do during those times? Should we stop confessing Christ and showing love to others? No. Rather submit your cause to Christ – remembering his encouragement: *Take heart! I have overcome the world.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Even though the LORD leads us through times of suffering, remember why he does it: as a witness to the world that has turned against him. God doesn't take pleasure in the death of anyone. He

wants all to repent and live. This is why he commands us to warn people of their sins and point them to the one and only Savior who paid for them all. Through faith in Christ God forgives sin and gives the gift of eternal life. Our family, friends and neighbors need to know this so that they can have the same hope we have and live.

Therefore let us submit our cause to Christ – asking him to help us that we do not become weary in doing good, remembering what the Bible says: *if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.*²¹ *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*^{iv} *For our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*^v

May these promises move you from complaint to confidence in Christ – even in the midst of your suffering for doing His will. Amen.

ⁱ Isaiah 42:8 NIV84

ⁱⁱ John 16:33a NIV84

ⁱⁱⁱ John 16:33b NIV84

^{iv} 1 Peter 2:20-21 NIV84

^v Romans 8:18 NIV84