

## ***“The Lord Longs to Gather You”***

Folks, you have heard the Word of the Lord this morning – the account of the Prophet Jeremiah and his preaching to God’s children of old – and the account of Jesus who laments over Jerusalem and the rebelliousness of God’s children in His day.

You hear their message – and you see the results – the blowback and suffering that ensues. IF we were to look at this merely with the eyes of the world – we would have to conclude that Christianity has a bad marketing approach – that it needs a new message. After all, the world teaches us that “the customer is always right.”

Parents, you know what this is like when you try to love your children. If you say NO to the customer (I mean, your child), they begin to cry. If you discipline them, they say that you are ruining their life! If you set boundaries and have expectations – then you are accused of being too strict (out of step with the way the world does things).

And if that isn’t bad enough, everyone piles on. The experts tell you that you need to provide your children with every opportunity. “That’s the loving thing to do” (implying that what you are doing is wrong, and harmful). Parenting is hard.

In the Old Testament reading the Prophet Jeremiah is called to love the children of God. He is sent to speak “all that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people.” It is God who is speaking to His children – and what is their response? They say to Jeremiah, “You shall die.”

In spite of the blowback, he stays the course. He doesn’t change his tune. “The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard. 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 He has pronounced against you.”

Repent, the Lord says. “Mend your ways and your deeds.” Turn from your sin, which is bringing disaster upon you. That is a loving message. It is the Lord’s desire to gather His children once again, so that they might not die, but live.

The suffering and the struggle continue for Jeremiah throughout his life, but he does not shrink back. And according to tradition – in the end, he is stoned to death by the very children of God who would not listen, who would not mend their ways and their deeds. It's hard to be a prophet of the one true God.

Fast-forward to Jesus, and you see that nothing has changed. The message of the Lord our God has not changed – nor has the rebelliousness of His children.

Jesus follows in a long train of the prophets who came before Him – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, John the Baptist. They too experienced the blowback and suffering. Many of them were killed for faithfully being the voice of God to His people.

Now, when Jesus comes to Jerusalem, some of the Pharisees warn Him to flee, to run away, “for Herod wants to kill you.” The Pharisees, who have been at odds with Jesus at every turn – appear to be doing a loving thing – but in reality, they are tempting Him to divert from the course that God the Father has laid out for Him.

Like Jeremiah before Him, Jesus stays the course. “Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!”

Jesus knows what lies in store for Him. The “third day” language is Easter resurrection language – and if there is a resurrection, there must first be a death. He knows that His way leads to the cross – that they will crucify Him – and yet, He does not run away. His course leads not only to a cross – but to a resurrection – for He longs to gather God's children to Himself – to His death and resurrection.

Dearly beloved, you live in a world that reacts violently to the voice of the Lord your God. Even today the prophets of the Lord are being killed and those whom the Lord sends to them are stoned to death. The message of the world is that “the customer is always right” – and the only sermon they want to hear is that God says their ways and deeds are right. It's hard to be a Christian.

It's hard to be a Christian because Christianity says that God is right. His Word is true. He alone calls the shots. And what He says is truly love.

The Lord loves you so much that He dares to call you to repentance – to “mend your ways and your deeds.” He expects you to obey the voice of the Lord – because He desires to gather you as a hen gathers her chicks – to gather you to Himself, so that He might protect you from the disaster that will come upon all sinners who do not repent and believe in Him.

You will not hear about this disaster from the world. They will keep telling you everything is fine – live your life however you want and everything will be fine in the end. But the Lord loves you enough to warn you – to tell you that “the wages of sin is death” – and that “whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

Dearly beloved, do not forsake the Word of the Lord – do not shut your ears when He shows you your sin – “mend your ways and your deeds, and obey the voice of the Lord.”

Those in Jerusalem who would not repent were forsaken. Jesus and His forgiveness would leave town, and they would not see Him again until He comes riding into Jerusalem again on a donkey, and they cried out, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Jesus comes to you today in, with, and under the humble forms of bread and wine – to relent from the disaster coming upon sinners – to give you His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of all your sins. That's why we sing in the Sanctus, just before we receive the Lord's Supper – “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

You do not see Him when He comes to you today – but you will see Him when He comes again in judgment on the Last Day. On that day, all repentant sinners who trust in His forgiveness will once again cry out – “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” Blessed are you, whom the Lord gathers to Himself, this very day. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.