

# "Kill the Preacher!"

Jeremiah 26:8-15

February 24, 2013

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent

Imagine this scene if you can: the sermon is over. Nobody dozed off during *this* sermon. The reluctant preacher is finished saying what he had to say: "Thus says the Lord: Repent. Turn from your evil way. Walk in my Word." The people had heard it all before. The people begin to discuss the sermon. "So, what do you think of the preacher?" "I think he's a jerk!" What a horrible message – so negative!" He's abrasive, intrusive, bad form – all in the Lord's house, this holy temple, this holy city. Get him!"

That's the reception Jeremiah receives in our Old Testament reading for today. "And when Jeremiah had finished speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him, saying, 'You shall die!'"

Kill the preacher! (This is not a policy I'm advocating!) Why were the people so angry and ready to kill? Why do they hate what they have heard? Maybe it's because they lived in chaotic, uncertain times and their world was falling apart. Maybe it's because they in Judah knew what happened to their brothers to the north in Israel who had been conquered by the invading army of Assyria in 722 B.C. Maybe they could sense their own decline and fall. Maybe they were just sick of Jeremiah, the prophet. He was preaching the same old thing: sin and repentance. They didn't want to hear that.

Yet this is what Jeremiah has to say. It is what Jeremiah had been sent by God to say. He says, "For in truth the Lord sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears." What was so offensive? Jeremiah had said that this house (the temple in which they were standing) would be like Shiloh and this city (Jerusalem) would be desolate and without any inhabitants.

What was Shiloh? It was a city about 20 miles north of Jerusalem. It was the place, from the time of Joshua until the time of Samuel, where God's dwelling place with man had been. It had been

the place where the tabernacle (the place of worship), the ark of the covenant (God's glory) and the mercy seat (where the atoning blood, shed for the people of God was sprinkled) resided. Great Shiloh, the place where God forgave sins!

What had changed? God and His mercy hadn't changed. The people of God had changed. Rather than repenting of their sin and seeking God's mercy and forgiveness, they began to take refuge in their status as the people of God. They treated God and the things of God as good luck charms. Their worship was done by the letter of the law. They put in their time and did their sacrifices. When they needed something of God, THEN they paid attention. They would trot out the ark of the covenant for a battle, treating it almost like a weapon, feeling assured that they would win because, after all, they were the people of God.

People had ignored God's word and His call to repent. So what happened? God withdrew His presence from Shiloh. He destroyed the city and allowed the ark of the covenant to fall into the hands of the Philistines. The town was left without an inhabitant. Just like that, great Shiloh was gone.

Jeremiah said this could happen all over again with the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. The people hated him for that and they hated him for his call to repentance and faith. They wanted to hear messages about how good they were and how God would bless them – something more uplifting than Jeremiah's "gloom and doom." Yet Jeremiah refuses to stop. He offers no apology or retraction, even though he faces death. His only defense? He only speaks what the Lord has sent him to speak.

Some things never change. People today, including Christians – the people of God – hate hearing the message of sin and repentance. We'd like to think we are pretty good – not perfect (no one would say THAT) – but pretty good. We take comfort in the fact that we are the people of God – Lutherans – confirmed members of this congregation. God becomes our good luck charm. He's there when we need Him, but, other than that, we don't want Him to bother us. In exchange for that,

we put in our time on Sunday morning – follow the liturgy, sing the hymns, and dutifully listening to the sermon.

We don't like to hear that we not only occasionally do wrong, but that we are, by nature, sinful and unclean. We bristle when we hear calls to repent and turn away from what we like to do to do what God wants us to do. We don't want to hear about what happened to Shiloh and what happened to Jerusalem where God destroyed city and the place of worship. That could never happen to us. God would never withdraw His glory from us or take away our place of worship.

So the preacher should come up with more upbeat messages about how good we are and how good God is so that we feel good. Yet, preachers like myself continue to call for repentance, especially during the time of Lent.

The good news for Jeremiah was that, even though the leaders said he should die for his call to repentance, Jeremiah did not die then and there. The good news for modern day preachers like myself is that it hasn't happened to us either. The bad news though is that, even if the temple leaders had killed off Jeremiah or if modern day preachers of repentance could be done away with, that still wouldn't help the problem. Killing preachers to do away with the negative message of sin and repentance is like killing doctors for their negative diagnosis of cancer. "Killing the messenger" doesn't stop the consequences.

Yet there is hope for the situation. While either Jeremiah or I could die at the hands of sinners, neither he nor I could die *for* sinners in any way that could help them or you. But God sent someone who could and would. In our Gospel, we read of Jesus being threatened by death for His activities at the hands of King Herod. Herod and other did not care for His message of "Repent! The kingdom of God is near!"

Yet Jesus refused to stop. He told the Pharisees to "Go and tell that fox" that he was not about to stop proclaiming the kingdom of God by casting out demons, performing cures, and preaching

repentance. Not only did Jesus know that doing this and going to Jerusalem meant death for Him, Jesus headed straight for it in order to finish His course – His mission.

Why did He do such a crazy thing? He did it out of intense love for you, me, and all people and the great desire to make those who are God's enemies by virtue of their sin, rebellion, apathy, and indifference to repentance into His friends. Jesus pleaded, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" God wants you and me. The Scripture says, God "wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:4) It is not God's lack of love or indifference to us which leads to hell. It is our refusal to repent and our indifference to Him. For them, Jesus says, "Behold, your house is forsaken."

Thankfully, Jesus completed His course. He would enter Jerusalem as people shouted, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." He did not avoid betrayal but walked headlong into it. He did not resist soldiers, but allowed them to arrest Him. He did not prevent death (as He could have as the Son of God), but He willingly laid down His life for the sheep. By His sacrifice of Himself upon the Mercy Seat of the cross and the blood that flowed from there, the forgiveness of sins has been won for all. Because of what He did on the third day, death has been destroyed. Life has been won – a life that cannot be interrupted by the grave but which endures past the grave for all eternity.

Jesus still calls and sends preachers like He did with Jeremiah. Like Jeremiah, He still provides them with the words to speak. Any faithful preacher will speak Jesus' words and not his own. And the message is still the same these many millennia later.

Jesus, through preachers, still speaks of sin and calls for repentance, even from His own people. It will still be hated by many and rejected by some, as in Jeremiah's day. Yet it is a necessary negative message to be heard – not for God's sake, but for our sake. It is like a doctor

who must speak a negative diagnosis first before he speaks of a cure. Without the diagnosis, the patient won't see the need for the cure or take it. But with the diagnosis spoken, the doctor can then provide the cure.

In the same way, without the message of the law and sin, sinners won't see the need for a cure nor will they take it. The message of Law and the call to repent is spoken so that God may deliver the Gospel and all of its benefits. Forgiveness, life, and salvation are delivered to us in Holy Baptism, the Word of Absolution, the preaching of the Gospel, and in His blood in wine along with His body in bread. By the working of the Holy Spirit through these means (and not by anything our sinful self or rebellious mind could do), we are reconciled to God. We are not only His servants or even His people. We are His friends.

If it's all right with you, let's take "kill the preacher" off our bucket list right now. Instead, let us hear the word of the Lord which He gives preachers to speak for our warning and our benefit. Hear the Law and, by the working of the Holy Spirit through that Word of God, repent of your sin and turn from it. Hear the Gospel and, by the working of the Holy Spirit through that Word of God, believe it and receive the benefits which the great Preacher, Jesus Christ, won for you by being forsaken on the cross, left desolate – crucified, dead, buried, but raised on the third day. He is the Preacher for you. Amen.