

First Lutheran Church
Fort Benton, MT
Peace Lutheran Church
Great Falls MT
28 June 2020

The Sent Ones
Jeremiah 28:5-9

The desire for peace in the Middle East has long been an American political goal. From the time the little nation of Israel was carved out and put on the map once again in 1946, obtaining peace in the region has been a constant challenge. Today's text from Jeremiah's account speaks of peace coming in conjunction with the Lord sending His prophet. His tone is Messianic. Before Hananiah and Jeremiah's time, prophets were bringing the people ominous news of impending war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. Now Jeremiah, the great prophet of God, proclaims good news of peace in the future embodiment of a prophet par excellence.

What do we see as we gaze into the mirror and examine ourselves as a nation? As we approach our national birthday, we do well to reflect on our past but also imagine our future as one nation, under God. Is there peace in our future? Can we expect a stronger, more unified, patriotic band of people in the coming years, or will America remain mired in and marred by incessant political infighting both in Washington and at home? These are things of which debates are made. Just bringing up talk of politics raises a lot of peoples' hackles. The Church has a message that transcends such talk and debate. It is the message of peace that comes to all peoples in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the One Sent whom Jeremiah identifies when he says by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet" (verse 9). So Jeremiah prophesies of Jesus coming as Peacemaker to restore and heal all who have been battered and beaten down by oppression. Isaiah calls Jesus the "Prince of Peace." Many of our Christmas cards and greetings to friends and relatives echo this theme of peace in Christ. The question is how lasting is the peace? How peaceful is it as long as we live in a world broken and deteriorating because of sin?

Jesus gives us the answer in today's gospel lesson from Matthew 10. Here is what the True Prophet and Prince of Peace has to say: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Mt. 10:34). So much for the prospect of lasting peace! So much for Jeremiah's resounding "Amen! May the Lord do so" to Hananiah's words of peace and prom-

ise for Judah's exilic return! Perhaps Jeremiah was speaking of someone else, we may reasonably conclude. Perhaps he was simply latching on to the rhetoric of his day and giving his own political spin. Perhaps Jeremiah simply got it wrong. Perhaps we have all got it wrong.

Our Prince of Peace does not speak of political peace in this world. Remember that His kingdom is not of this world. When we read of peace in 6th century B.C. or even 1st century A.D., we must not assume it means worldly peace in our day. Jesus' peace is not the kind where everything goes. It is not a peace in which all religions of the world are free to pursue their own notions of God and overlook what is false and idolatrous about them. Jesus does not grant us a peace in which households are in complete agreement and the enemy is isolated to some foreign country. He says that a person's enemies will be those of his own household, and that His coming will set family members against one another. Why? How can this be, you ask? The answer is rooted in the First Commandment. You shall have no other gods before Me.

My Bible has these words of Jesus is red because they come from the very lips of Jesus Himself to everyone who has ears to hear. "Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves son of daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Mt. 10:37-39). This is what it means to be a true prophet of the Most High. This is the expected standard of real and lasting peace for the Christian. Notice the mention of the cross. That must have been very peculiar to the ears of the people who first heard it. What does Jesus mean by taking up a cross and following Him? We know the answer to that post-resurrection. The whole Scriptures point to Jesus as the True Prophet sent by the Father to bring back the vessels of the Lord's house, restoring you and I to a right place within the Holy of Holies. This happens for us in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It happens in the shedding of His blood on the battlefield of suffering and shame He endured. If you want true peace in your life, it comes by way of the sword. If you wish to truly live a full life, you must first lose yourself completely in Christ.

Jeremiah quickly learned the lesson of the cross in his vocation as prophet. He did not receive the same respect and attention that we give prophets today. It was a tough business being a prophet in B.C. time. Speaking God's truth could cost you your head. We see it time and again in the lives of men like Elijah and Elisha, of Isaiah and Ezekiel, and countless others who took up their cross to follow the Lord. The prophets and apostles have a special place in God's kingdom. We sing of them as examples for us to follow in our own cross-bearing. They are the saints who have gone before us whose robes have been bleached white in the blood of the Lamb. Will there be a robe waiting for you? Will there be one re-

served for me? Does yours and my life today reflect and anticipate the life of the world to come?

We've been speaking of peace today, a peace that looks much different than the political peace most people think about. As Christians living in a fallen world, we believe that Jesus' peace was won for us on the cross and that this peace will divide people rather than unite them under false pretense. To help us understand and embrace this peace as gift to us from the Prince of Peace this little prayer at the end of the Vespers best captures Jeremiah's intent.

Let us pray: O God, from whom come all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works, give to us, Your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey Your commandments and also that we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, and live in peace and quietness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

And the peace of God, which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.