

Not an Easy Message
Sunday Pentecost 4, Year A
Jeremiah 28: 5 – 9; Romans 7: 1 – 13; Matthew 10: 34 – 42
June 28, 2020

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Peace and truth. These are two words that are in short supply right now in our world. Many claim to have it, but there are not many who are delivering on it.

The news media doesn't have it. Government doesn't have it. Protestors and rioters don't have it. All the 'experts' in my friends list on Facebook don't have it.

But, you do.

But, probably not in the way you think.

Jesus had it. But, again, probably not in the way you think he did.

Jeremiah, had it. But, probably not in the way you think he did.

So, let's start there...with Jeremiah.

Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, told of the terrible things that would beset the people of Judah. The truth that he preaches to the people is one of exile, destruction, turmoil... but, the people didn't want to hear that. Instead, they wanted prophets like Hananiah, who would tell them that there would be nothing but peace; earthly peace.

Jeremiah shows up at the temple wearing a yoke. Yes, a yoke. A farm implement. A yoke was used to harness oxen or other work animals. In the yoke they were completely subject to their master. If the reigns said go left, the animal would go left. If it said go right, the animal would go right. They could fight the yoke, but it had them constrained.

Jeremiah wore a yoke into the temple. In wearing a yoke, he was telling the people that they were subject to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. While the other prophets were speaking of peace and deliverance, Jeremiah spoke of ongoing oppression.

Who do you think was more popular with the people? Jeremiah would not have been elected president...of anything. His platform was ongoing oppression, exile, doom and gloom. Hananiah's message was peace and deliverance. Yeah, it would have been a landslide.

But, only one of them could be right. No doubt, Jeremiah would have loved to have preached the same thing as Hananiah and the other false prophets. It sounds good. It sounds pleasant. It sounds like peace. But, it is a lie.

Many false teachers today proclaim the same thing; peace and prosperity, deliverance from oppression. The Word of Faith movement is founded on this idea, with such false teachers like Kenneth Copeland, the late Kenneth Hagin; founder of Rhema Bible Institute in Tulsa, Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, Joseph Prince, Creflo Dollar, Rod Parsley, and now, even Beth Moore and President Trump's spiritual advisor; Paula White.

These false teachers stirrup images of having your best life now, name it and claim it, and what has become known as, the Prosperity Gospel.

They are modern day Hananiah's. They tell people there is peace, where there is no peace. They are caught up in this temporal existence. Avoid them.

We, pastors, also wear a yoke. That is what the stole represents. Colored cloth that hangs around our necks. It shows that we are bound to our master. If He says go left, we go left. If He says go right, we go right. We can try to fight it, but we are constrained.

Pastors sometimes have to give that hard message. Trust me, it is easier to say the peaceful stuff, the stuff that makes us all feel good. But, that is not always the truth, especially in this life. We get hate mail. Thankfully, not many of us are beheaded in our country. But, that could easily change.

But, I think now you can understand, hopefully a little better, Jesus word today, “*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).

Jesus is saying to us, that it is going to be difficult to be one of His disciples. It isn’t going to be easy, fun, or delightful. This is why we refer to the Church on earth as the Church Militant. We are at war. The devil hates you. The world, if you speak the truth, hates you. Even your own family might hate you.

The world wants you on their side. And many churches have appeased them. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), much of the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church, and many others. They have abandoned Christ to preach this message of peace, when there is no peace. They have joined with the world, and because they have joined with the world, the world loves them. They preach the ‘morality’ of abortion, homosexuality, transgenderism... they preach that these things are good, and wholesome, and acceptable to God. Even when the Scriptures renounce these things.

So, Jesus tells you, His disciples that “*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*” (v. 38-39).

Yes, I was raised by a good southern mama. I was told that if you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all. And, generally, I hold to that. But, not when it comes to obeying my master. Yes, we may buck against the yoke, but eventually we will either break from our master and run wild in fields, or we will submit to Him, do the hard work, plow the field, break a sweat, carry the burden, keep our heads down, and keep moving forward.

Is it hard? Yes. And, it will get harder. The protests and riots going on in our country have already turned against the Church; against God. They are already calling to remove statues and images of Luther and Jesus. They had already made it a cultural sin to pray at public gatherings, to display Christian symbols in memorials, and the like. I could be wrong, I am not a prophet like Jeremiah, but I don't see it getting any easier.

But, we keep preaching the truth. Why? Because, God loves them, too. He loves the sinner. If He didn't, we wouldn't be allowed in here. He loves the young woman who had an abortion. Yes, murder is a sin, but that doesn't mean God doesn't love them. He loves the homosexual, those who have multiple partners, those who have been involved in all sorts of depravity, violence, hate, and debauchery. He loved St. Paul; a persecutor of the Church. He loved Moses; a murderer. He loved King David; an adulterer. He loved the Church in Corinth who had homosexuals, drunkards, and worse.

We have to move past the idea that it is some sort of competition. You are no better than they are. They are in a lie. The world tells them that they can do what they want, be what they want, have what they want... It just isn't true. Happiness isn't found in those things.

But, the world doesn't want to hear it. They don't want to hear that God has a standard, a way in which He created and ordered things, a way that was designed for peace and happiness. They don't want to be constrained by His yoke, as they see it as oppressive. But, Jesus says, *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”* (Mt. 11:28-29).

Be faithful. Peace with the world ends when your earthly life ends. But, peace with God lasts forever.

Pray for those who wish to deceive, both in the Church and in the world. Pray for those who wish to lead people astray, especially our brothers and sisters in the faith. Be a disciple. Be faithful. Speak the truth, because it is the truth, and even your enemy needs to hear that God loves them and will forgive them, too. That is the truth. That is real peace.

Now may the peace that passes all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.