

“Speaking the Word Faithfully”

Jeremiah 23:16-29

Saturday Evening, August 13, 2022 + 10th Sunday after Pentecost (Observed)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The text might well be summed up in this verse: “Let him who has My word speak My word faithfully” (v.28). By the grace of God, Christ has committed His word to us. Every baptized Christian is part of the Church of Christ, to which He has given the Office of the Keys. That means that we all have the authority to speak the word of Christ that alone can open the door to heaven. We are all charged to be ready to give answer to anyone who asks us the reason for the hope that we have. We typically do this as the opportunity arises in our private lives. It is by the authority of Christ that a Congregation calls a pastor to publicly preach the word of God and administer the Sacraments according to the Gospel. For the sake of order, an ordained pastor is called to do this public work, but we are all partners in what the pastor does publicly. For example, you, the listeners, have the God-given right and responsibility to judge the doctrine, or teaching, of the pastor, and to call him to account if he departs from the pure message of the word. That’s why the message of this text is for all of us, though it is especially important for pastors and teachers of the church: “Let him who has My word speak My word faithfully.” To get a handle on the text, let us, first, concentrate on speaking the word faithfully when it confronts us with our sins, and, secondly, concentrate on speaking the word faithfully when it comforts sinners who know and feel their sin.

-- I --

Jeremiah was called to be a prophet, or spokesman, for God during the dark days and years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the forced exile of many of its citizens. For generations prophet after prophet had been warning that the people of Judah were stirring up God’s anger by their worship of idols and by adopting many wicked practices of the people around them. God had called them to be a separate, holy, people, but they were living in many of the horrible practices of the unbelieving people around them. Prophet after prophet spoke, but only a few listened. If many listened it was

only for a time. By and large, the wickedness continued. By the time of Jeremiah the situation was so bad that many false prophets were speaking lies to the people. The Lord had not spoken to them or revealed anything to them, and yet they went to the people and said: “The Lord says....” Particularly, they are taken to task for failing to call the people to repent of our their sins: “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They say continually to those who despise the word of the LROD, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you’” (vv. 16-17).

Sounds like our day, doesn't it? People don't want to listen to a preacher who shows them their sins and guilt. They would rather listen to someone who helps them find a way to justify themselves. In the Church of God all too many want to have the pastor give them excuses to live just like the rest of the world, instead of a pastor who will honestly show them their sins. Pastors are not simply hired by a congregation to tell them what they want to hear. “We pay your salary, Pastor, so you have to preach the message we want you to preach.” Our Congregation has always been set up quite differently from that. Pastors called to serve here are called to preach the word of God as it is taken from the Old and New Testaments of Holy Scripture and confessed in the Symbols, or standards, of the evangelical Lutheran Church, such as the three creeds in our hymnbook, and the Small Catechism. This means that the Pastor, if he is doing his job, will go ahead and use the word of God to show people their sins, even the sins that go against what “everyone else is doing”—especially to show such sins, to preach and teach in such a way that people become convicted of their sin and guilt.

To be truthful is truly an act of love. A man or woman who has a deadly disease does not want the doctor to ignore or downplay the disease. No, it is much better if the doctor is forthright and upfront, though we do appreciate a kind and gentle bedside manner.

The warnings here are severe. For one thing, God shows that He is sees and knows what the lying prophets are saying. The Lord says in the text, “Am

I a God at hand, ... and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? Declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? Declares the LORD” (vv.23-24). This is a proof-text for the omnipresence of God. He is present everywhere. God fills heaven and earth! There is no place where He is not present. Here this is meant as a word of warning to the lying prophets: “I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name” (v.25). God is saying, “I hear the lies you speak. Do you false prophets think you can go behind the back of the Lord? Can you sneak around a corner where He will not see what you do and hear what you are saying?”

What a powerful word of warning! The Lord knows what we do in the most quiet, private situation. As our Maker and Judge, the Lord God does not owe us any privacy. In this day and age of technology, there are security systems with their cameras and monitors just about everywhere, it seems. And yet, the clever person can find a place and way to hide his or her deeds from the searching eye of the camera.

Not so with the Lord! That is to say, we should not think that we can somehow “turn off the camera” and do our thing apart from His knowledge. In the middle of the night, under the cloak of darkness, in the most quite place, there is no escaping His watchful eye. In fact, Scripture tells us very clearly that the Lord can see in the darkness just as well as in the light. “Even the darkness is not dark to You; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with You” (Psalm 139:12). He doesn’t need “night vision goggles”—it is all clearly seen by Him. In the most quiet and forsaken area, there is the Lord! When something is posted on the internet, He knows who wrote it! Indeed, even the thoughts and desires of our heart are an open book to Him.

And this is the trouble that sin is bringing: “Behold, the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has executed and accomplished the intents of His heart” (vv.19-20). If we are speaking the word of God faithfully, we will tell people who are living in rebellion against God and His ways, “The storm clouds are gathering in the west. If you do not

turn away from your sin and repent of it, you will bring God's judgment on yourself."

-- II --

There are many fearful statements in the text. But there are also truths to point us to the promises of God. Consider the statement that no one can hide from the Lord. For the redeemed, for the broken and contrite hearts seeking help from God, this word is a word of terrific comfort. God see us and knows us when we are in trouble. He knows we need help. He sees His little lambs every hour of every day. This has been a tremendous source of comfort to persecuted Christians, arrested and put into deep dungeons, secluded in solitary confinement, banished to so-called "God-forsaken" places of the earth. The Christian knows with great delight that there is no such thing on earth as a "God-forsaken" place. The Lord fills all things! He is not just a God at hand and not a God far off. He has come to redeem His people. In the person of His Son Jesus Christ, God Himself has come to us. He took bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. He lived out a perfect life in a broken world. This perfection of His now covers the sin and guilt of all who believe in Him. He has answered for our sins completely and in full by His death on the cross. Every last sin, whether committed in the open or under the cloak of darkness—each and every sin has been removed. His resurrection guarantees to us the free gift of this forgiveness and life with Him that will never end.

Now this Lord continues to be present among us, not just in His general omnipresent way, but in His gracious and merciful way, to help, save, bless, and strengthen us. He is present among us where His word is used. The text compares the true word of God to grain. Unlike the chaff or straw, which is gathered up and thrown in the fire, the grain, when it is sown, produces many times what was sown. It has in it the power of life and growth. This morning we have the privilege of receiving the Lord's Supper. Because of promises of God like this one, that God fills all things, we do not doubt but gladly believe that here the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is present to give us His body and His blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

The text points to promises that show us the power of God's word to bring comfort to troubled sinners, to bring life to people who know that they are dead

in their trespasses and sins: “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10-11). Consider the Parable of the Sower, which shows that God’s word can produce 30, 60, or even 100 times what was sown. When we speak the word of God faithfully, it can have this saving, blessing, effect.

May God help us all, then, that His word would be spoken faithfully! May we let it do its work of showing people their sins—ourselves included—and also when it brings us the life-giving word of Jesus, who is always with us. Amen.