

## "The Overheard Word -- Jeremiah and God"

### Jeremiah 15:15-21

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Trinity 14 - Series A

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho

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Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the LORD our God; that is, in the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

In the past three months about 150 men have been ordained into the Public Ministry of the Word in our sister congregations. There will be some, like myself, sent to congregations wherein the overwhelming majority of the active people are faithful to the LORD God, respectful of the pastor, desiring to hear Law and Gospel sermons and teaching, thirsting for the means of grace, thankful for the historic liturgy and avoiding all the nonsense that had befallen so many others, both pastors and congregations, both here in our circuit and throughout the synod.

Sadly there will be some younger pastors, too many to be sure, who will be ordered and pressured to violate their recently-spoken ordination vows. The added, not-so-subtle demands of district officials and/or congregational leaders will weigh heavily upon these new pastors. Some will succumb and of those, the blessed ones will be those men granted the Holy Spirit's gift of repentance and they will awaken in the wee hours of the "morning after" with an accusing conscience and the desire and determination never to do that again. Then, following their absolution they will wonder how to bear fruit that befits repentance and they will face the same people who have had their way with the pastor and fully expect and demand him to engage in spiritual adultery again and again. The man might then ask, "What's a pastor to do? Call it quits?"

Dearly beloved, it was here that the introduction to this sermon was to end as the announcement of the sermon theme and the reading of the text were to commence. However, an email received at three in the morning a couple weeks ago resulted in an addition. The pastor was at an end and ready to call it quits. His wife had been having an affair and after two years of unsuccessful counseling, had divorced him this past last spring. Then, the pastor's mother, who had been struggling with cancer, died last month. Then the congregation, which had been so supportive of their pastor during these trying times, had suddenly, without warning, become embroiled in a silly controversy that tore through the people. The pastor became the focal point of the heated arguments and bore the brunt of the attacks. Thus, this man feels that he has lost the three women he loved the most in the world - his wife, his mother, and the Church. So, once again the question, "What's a pastor to do? Call it quits?"

Please listen to the first portion of the Old Testament reading assigned to the Church today, doing so under the theme of . . .

. . . "The Overheard Word — Jeremiah and God" . . .

First, the overheard Word of Jeremiah:

"O LORD, Thou knowest; remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In Thy forbearance take me not away; know that for Thy sake I bear reproach. Thy words were found, and I ate them, and Thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by Thy Name, O LORD, God of Hosts. I did not sit in the company of merry-makers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because Thy hand was upon me, for Thou hadst filled me with indignation. Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Wilt Thou be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail?"

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Do you not hear the pain and hurt in this young prophet who was hated by so many people who, though in the physical congregation, were no part of the Lord's church? Surely Jeremiah was often awake at 3:00 am. The young man had started out so well and with such joy. The LORD had known that Jeremiah would be one of His prophets before he was born. God had said to him, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Jeremiah replied, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth" (Jeremiah 1:5-6).

Jeremiah, you have been called to this. Do you not recall what the LORD said to you? "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD." Men have received this Call to be the servant of the Word in a place and with a people. We believe, teach and confess that no one should preach the Word or publicly administer the Sacraments without a regular Call. In these latter days, however, both local congregations led by leaders who follow the worldly advice and counsel of district officials are issuing contracts to men to be CEOs of the church or mules for men. Keep this in mind as we begin to make preparations for a new pastor; one who will be called, not contracted – one who will be a shepherd, not a hireling.

"Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, 'Behold, I have put My Words in your mouth.'" The young prophet was not only called, but also prepared, for they are servants, not of themselves, but of the One Who called and sent them. But, how does one prepare? The answer is by being in the Word of God, which they receive and study and ponder the application, even as they confess unto the LORD: "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your Name, O LORD God of Hosts."

Today qualified men study and prepare for eight years beyond high school in order to become a pastor in one of our confessional congregations - four years in college, three years studying at the seminary and one year of a vicarage, which is something like an internship. These are times for studying Law and Gospel in the text and pondering what this means in the congregation. May the man who becomes pastor here next - whether he be right out of the seminary or an experienced man in the field - be able to say with the prophet: "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your Name, O LORD God of Hosts."

So what could possibly go wrong? The qualified man has a Call. He's been trained in the Word. He knows what it means to be a pastor. He's sent to a congregation. According to his ordination vows,

he attempts to preach and teach the Word in its truth and purity, and administer the Sacraments as the Lord Jesus instituted them. He tries to lead an upright life and neither tarnish nor discredit the Ministry of the Word and the office of the preacher.

His Call was to speak of sin and grace; to tell the people the Good News that the LORD God grants salvation by His grace through faith in Him. Here, in the LORD our God is the Redeemer Who has bought you back from death unto Himself. He is the Divine pardon for your past, your present and your future. He has redeemed you. He has called you by name. You are His. What freedom is bestowed by His unconditional forgiveness of sins announced in the Church. What fullness of life is given freely here and extends throughout all eternity. What joy of salvation is yours, not because of your works or deeds or intentions, but rather by the grace of God in Christ. Dearly beloved, here is your Savior . . . Savior, a word that means Jesus.

However, instead of being received with joy at such Word of God, it gets all turned around. So many of God's people will not listen to the Word of Life. What's the servant of the Word to do when his efforts are apparently so useless and the fruit of such preaching and teaching is so meager? Rather, the man even becomes the object of attacks from those in the congregation who begin to persecute him. The attacks come with the serpent's venom. What's a man to do? Call it quits? Truly this produces an awful, pastoral loneliness that extends even to the coldness and silence of the sanctuary. In anguish, he speaks to God.

"O LORD, You know; remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In Your enduring patience, do not take me away. Know that for Your sake I have suffered rebuke. Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your Name, O LORD God of Hosts. I did not sit in the assembly of the mockers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone because of Your hand, for You have filled me with indignation. Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable, which refuses to be healed? Will You surely be to me like an unreliable stream, as waters that fail?"

Second, the overheard words of the LORD God.

What do we hear from Him? You recall what He said to the young prophet, the man named Jeremiah, "the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign" (Jeremiah 1:1-2). "See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (1:10).

Dear Baptized, the following words, which include the last section of our sermon text, are what was emailed to the pastor at 4:00 am two weeks ago. They are set before the Church this day:

Please know that, in these latter days, you are not alone in these matters, which is true in more ways, and for more pastors, than you might first think. The Lord in His grace, mercy and peace is with you and His Word bestows the assurance that, while many sins and agents of evil assault you, they are not able to overcome your soul. The Lord bless you and keep you. Remember, according to God's Word of promise, you also have the like-minded brothers throughout the world, men of the brotherhood and who bear the stole, who support with words of encouragement to you, or prayers to God on your behalf, or both. You also have the true Church - the Bride of Christ - and the Lord Jesus, both of whom love you and care for you. Also yours are the means of grace. You are baptized.

You are absolved. You are fed.

. . . "Therefore thus says the LORD: 'If you return, then I will bring you back; you shall stand before Me; if you take out the precious from the vile, you shall be as My mouth. Let them return to you, but you must not return to them. And I will make you to this people a fortified bronze wall; and they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you; for I am with you to save you and deliver you,' says the LORD. 'I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem you from the grip of the terrible.'"

As I read these words this morning, I've pondered and prayed them on your behalf.

The cross. No other way. The lonely way.

Dearly beloved of Our Redeemer, this is neither new nor unexpected. A Lutheran pastor in Nazi Germany wrote the following in 1938 as the darkness of those days deepened:

“Many of us are lonely and forsaken: pastors who at lonely posts in areas of the church where today the very things which had been the church’s salvation through the times of the worst apostasy, the Word of the Holy Scriptures and the Sacraments of the Lord, are perishing. Young theologians face impossible tasks and are thrown into terrible conflicts of conscience. Instantly, at the very start of their life in the office, they learn to know the depth of the forsakenness into which God has always led his servants and which is the only way an entirely firm faith and a completely mature character is produced — faithful Christians who have proved true in life and in the service of the congregation and who must today experience how the judgment which passes over entire churches and their work also affects their own work. But how much lonely concern for the church is present even where the ecclesiastical circumstances still appear to be in order!” (From *The Church at the Turn of the Year*, “*The Lonely Way*,” by Hermann Sasse page 432)

The Word they still shall let remain, Nor any thanks have for it;  
He's by our side upon the plain, With His good gifts and Spirit,  
And take they our life, Goods, fame, child, and wife,  
Let these all be gone, They yet have nothing won;  
The Kingdom our remaineth. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.