

28 February 2018  
Lent 2 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church

Jesu Juva

“Return to the Lord . . . Who Will Restore You”

Text: Jeremiah 15:15-21; Luke 13:31-35

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

Jeremiah wanted to quit. Give it up. Throw in the towel. And more than once. Of all the prophets, I think he had it the worst. He had the hardest job. The people just wouldn't listen. He spoke God's Word to them time and time again and called them to repentance, yet the more he cried out, the more they ignored him. And they didn't just ignore him, they got so tired of listening to him that they threw him into a pit so they wouldn't have to listen to him anymore.

Because, you see, there were *other* prophets. Other prophets who were also speaking to the people along with Jeremiah. Except they weren't saying the same things as Jeremiah. They were false prophets who told the people that Jeremiah didn't know what he was talking about; that he was a couple of cards short of a full deck. And there were more of them. Why listen to that crazy loner when you have all of us?

So he says that if you don't repent, then Jerusalem is going to fall? *No*. God wouldn't let that happen to His city. God wouldn't let that happen to His Temple. Everything's going to be fine. It's not as bad as Jeremiah says. . . . Except it was. And time was running out. God's patience was running out. And because of the people's unfaithfulness and idolatry, God was not only going to let His city and Temple be destroyed, *He was going to cause it*. Tough love, for a tough, stubborn, and stiff-necked people. But it didn't have to be. If they would repent, if they would trust the Lord, they would be spared.

But they wouldn't listen. The words of the false prophets were too sweet. Why eat vegetables when you can have ice cream? So into the pit went Jeremiah, along in their sin went the people, and Jeremiah wanted to quit. It wasn't worth it. **THEY** weren't worth it, these miserable, no good, stiff-necked, unfaithful, idolatrous people.

Except they *were* worth it to God.

So God wouldn't let Jeremiah quit. But He didn't threaten him, He gave him promises instead. He reassured Jeremiah that He was with him and would help him and strengthen him. And so as we heard, God tells Jeremiah: ***If you return, I will restore you . . .***

Now at this point, you can almost hear the steam coming out of Jeremiah's ears. If **I** return?? Wait. What? You've got to be kidding Lord! I'm not the problem! It's them! They're the problem, Lord. Remember? *They're* the ones who won't listen. *They're* the ones who won't obey. *They're* the ones who threw me into this pit! If **I** return . . . ??

Yes, they are a problem. No doubt, Jeremiah. But so are you. You don't believe me. You don't trust me. Your hopelessness and despair is sin. You're not just giving up on them; you're giving up on ME. So yes, you, Jeremiah. Repent and **return to me** . . . and three promises God makes Jeremiah:

- (1.) ***I will restore you, and you shall stand before me.***
- (2.) ***I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they shall not prevail over you.*** And
- (3.) ***I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.***

How good those words must have sounded to Jeremiah! Yet words that he would have to take on faith. For they hadn't happened yet. But a promise is as good as the one who makes it, and so if the Lord of all creation makes you a promise, you can count on it. And Jeremiah did. Those sweet words and promises of God are exactly what he needed, they were exactly what the people needed, and they are exactly what we need.

For maybe you've been in Jeremiah's place. At your wit's end, ready to throw in the towel, give up - give up on others, maybe even give up on God. Because things aren't working out, the difficulties just seem to keep mounting higher, and those who do not speak the truth, those who work evil, those who lie and deceive, seem to be more and seem to be winning. Maybe you, too, have been hurled into the pit of despair.

And if that's you, then maybe you feel also like Jeremiah at being called to repentance, when it's those others who need to repent!

But repent we must. This Lenten season and all year through. For our own unbelief and mistrust. As if God doesn't see and doesn't care, as if He is asking us to do too much, as if His grace is not sufficient for us. And so the call goes out to repent, and to return to our gracious God and His wonderful promises. His promises to you that are very much like the promises He made to Jeremiah - to restore you, protect you, and deliver you.

Promises that are true for us in Jesus. We heard Jesus' lament over Jerusalem tonight, how He came for Jerusalem, wanted to care for and gather His people, but they rejected Him. They were unwilling.

But even so, He does not reject them. What does He say? Their ***house is forsaken***, yes. They have forsaken the faith of their fathers. They have not followed in their way. But Jesus will not forsake them. They ***will not see [Him] until they say, 'Blessed is he who***

*comes in the name of the Lord!*' But they will see Him. They will see Him enter Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to those words of blessing. They will see Him rejected. And then they will see Him on the cross. For there, on the cross, is where He will be restoring them. There, on the cross, is where He will be fulfilling all the promises of God. There, on the cross, He will be the forsaken one, so that we need never be.

And so as God said to Jeremiah: ***If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me.*** Though fallen in sin and death, the cross of Jesus brings forgiveness and life from the dead. God will raise up Jeremiah from the pit, and He will raise us up from the pit as well - the pit of sin and death. Jesus' resurrection will be our resurrection, and we will stand before God in righteousness and purity forever. That's His promise to you.

And if a promise is as good as the one who makes it, then you can be sure of this one! Because Jesus Himself is risen from the dead, and if Him, then also those who belong to Him, those who are in Him.

So no matter how bad things seem, no matter how bad things get, remember the promises of the Lord to you. Repent and return. For He will restore you. He is your life and your salvation. And you His dear child.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.