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“Worth It? Worth It!”

Text: Jeremiah 20:7-13; Matthew 10:5a, 21-33; Romans 6:12-23

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

Ever feel like just throwing up your hands and giving up?

It's too hard. It's taking too long. It's too much trouble. They're too ungrateful, too stubborn, too rebellious. It's not worth it. He's too stuck in his ways. She'll never change. I'm done. No more. That's it.

That's the lament we heard from Jeremiah this morning. God sent him as a prophet to Judah, but they aren't listening. He warns them of God's coming judgment and destruction and calls them to repent before it is too late, but all they do is mock him. And they're after him too. Trying to deceive him and waiting for him to fall so they can overcome him and take revenge on him for his words. For how dare he call *us* to repentance! How dare he call *us* wrong! How dare he warn *us*, God's chosen people!

So Jeremiah's done. Or he wants to be, at least. It's not worth it. *They're* not worth it. *This prophet gig is not all it's cracked up to be . . .*

I'm sure the disciples had days like that too. Jesus tells them in the Holy Gospel we heard today that, basically, what happened to Jeremiah is going to happen *to them*. They will be hated, they will be persecuted, they will be called demons, because they are speaking and doing God's Word. For sin doesn't like to be uncovered or corrected. It wants to be left alone and hidden and reign in the darkness. So expose it, poke it, or speak to it, and you will feel its wrath.

So I imagine the disciples had their Jeremiah moments. This is the thanks we get for giving up everything? For walking away from our businesses and jobs and families and homes and going out and trying to help these people? Fine! Done. You couldn't blame them if they thought: *This disciple gig isn't what we thought it would be . . .*

You ever feel that way? As a parent, a child, a spouse, a friend, as a Christian in an ever-increasingly un-Christian and anti-Christian world? This gig's not what I thought it would be; not how I thought it was going to turn out . . . Or maybe you've been on the other side of that and been the one causing someone else to throw up their hands in despair and just want to give up, because of your sin, your stubbornness, your pride.

Well . . . not *maybe*, right? We have. If not to others in the world, then certainly we've acted this way toward God. Not only by continuing to sin, but continuing to sin *and thinking nothing of it*. That's why Paul asked the Roman Christians in his letter to them: ***Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?*** Let me tell you: we do this all the time. What Paul is describing here is the attitude, so common, that *I can sin because I know Jesus will forgive me! Or, I love to sin and Jesus loves to forgive - what a system!* So, I know I shouldn't do this, I know I shouldn't say this, but I really want to, so . . . what the heck! God will forgive me!

Paul calls that being a ***slave to sin***. The world calls it freedom - being able to do whatever you want and follow your lusts and urges, whatever they may be. And that must be good because freedom is good, right? But the world gets it wrong. That's not freedom when you are controlled by your lusts and urges, temper and pride, your despair and moods. That's not freedom when something else controls you - that's slavery, masking itself as freedom and deceiving you into thinking this is a good thing. That you continue in its grip and control and not see the danger. And to which Paul then adds: *What good was that doing? What were you getting out of doing those things that lead only to death?* Perhaps we would answer: a moment of pleasure, a little satisfaction. But is it worth it?

So given the long history of the rebellion and stubbornness of God's people, beginning with Adam and Eve down to you and me today, you could hardly blame God if He threw His hands up and gave up on us. *That's the way you want to be? Fine. I'm done.*

But He didn't. He didn't leave us to our slavery to sin. Instead He threw up His hands **onto the cross**. His cross proclaiming: You are worth it! But not so we can go on sinning and continue to be slaves and sin as much as we want -only now not have anything to worry about! But to set us free from that slavery, *for something better*. That we not continue down the road of bitterness and division that leads to death and hell, but walk on the road of faith and love that leads to eternal life.

And so Jesus - the One who really was free - becomes the slave in our place. Though born as we are, He was not born in slavery to sin as we are, but freely put Himself there for you. A perfect life lived and a sacrificial death died, to set you free from sin. To slay that which enslaves us, that sin not reign in our bodies; that sin not control us; that we do not just what our bodily urges tell us to do, but freely resist such sin and keep instead the Word of God. Walk in the way of righteousness. Even describing ourselves - as Paul did - as ***slaves of righteousness*** - or slaves of the right, not of sin; slaves of good, not of evil; ***slaves of God*** unto holiness and eternal life.

Now you may at this point be thinking: slavery is slavery and I don't want to be a slave to anyone or anything. I want to be free. *But can you see?* Your desire to be free, to be your own master, **is itself a form a slavery and idolatry?** For it is not really a question of either being free or being a slave. That's really a false distinction or understanding. In the

world that might be true, but in spiritual matters it's not. For spiritually, the question is not whether or not you will have a master, but *who is your master?* Is it sin or is it God? Is it the taskmaster leading you to death, or the Saviour leading you to life?

Holy Baptism is where you are given a new master. Holy Baptism is where this divine re-yoking takes place. The words we heard from St. Paul today are from his famous baptism chapter, and so we need to hear them in that light. And so what he says here happens in baptism. When you are baptized, Jesus throws off the yoke of sin that we are not strong enough to throw off, and re-yokes us to Himself. To Him *whose yoke is easy and His burden light* (Matt 11:30). A much better master, indeed. A Good Shepherd, who forgives our sin, binds our wounds, and feeds us with Himself - His Body and Blood. And who does not give up, even leaving the 99 to go in search of that one who rebelled and wandered (Matt 18:12). Not willing that any - not a single one - should perish.

Which is why he sent Jeremiah to Judah, why He sent the disciples out, and why He is still calling and sending pastors and missionaries today. To call you and all people to repent - to confess that *I have lived as if God did not matter and as if I mattered most*, that I have lived as a slave to sin, that I have followed my own urges and desires - to repent and receive His unburdening forgiveness and life. For as Paul so clearly put it: *the wages of sin* - the wages of living as your own master, the wages of your so-called freedom - *is death, but the free gift of God* - to those who are yoked to Him, who are baptized into Him - *is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*.

So live in Christ, O baptized ones! *That's* who you are. And those people we are tempted to throw up our hands about and give up on . . . well, maybe not so fast. Maybe your Lord is sending you to speak a good word, to give His freeing forgiveness and loving care. Maybe to someone no one else will.

And if that's hard and even a bit frightening - for who knows what will happen, right? If your head will get bit off, you'll be taken advantage of, you'll be mocked and ridiculed and maybe even persecuted - well, remember these words of our Lord too: *have no fear of them*. Do not be afraid. I see every sparrow that falls to the ground and you're worth more than them. I know exactly how many hairs are on your head - you don't even know that. And while this world can kill you, no one can take your life. That's mine. I got you. You're my baptized child. And they can't change that.

And though there are many things hidden in this world and life, things that we cannot see and do not know, it will one day be made known, Jesus says. In the end, all will be revealed. So while we may not know why things are happening the way things are, and maybe they even seem to be turning out for the worse and that evil is winning, it is not so. The cross looked that way too, but it was in reality the greatest good. For on the cross Jesus was, to use the words of Jeremiah, *with us as a dread warrior*. Fighting this world's prince in a fight to the finish, and then rising triumphant.

So fear not, child of God. His triumph is for you. His triumph is your triumph. Things in this life may not be easy, but with Jesus, they are good and working good, for you. He promised.

So Jeremiah, though starting in lament and despair, can end in joy, saying: ***Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord!*** For the victory is his even now, even in the midst of troubles, by faith. You too. For He who bought you at the price of His own blood, is even *now confessing you before the Father in heaven*. That even while the trials and troubles still rage, even while the burdens are heavy and sin seems so strong, even though you cannot see the victory now, **it is yours**. In Christ. And if it is in Christ, then it is beyond the reach of sin, satan, death, and hell. And so it is safe - you are safe - in Him. To ***sing to the Lord*** and ***praise the Lord*** with Jeremiah, with the disciples, and with all who have gone before us. ***For He who has delivered the life of Jesus from the hand of evildoers,*** delivers you too.

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