

May God’s grace, mercy, and peace be yours this day in the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord, Saviour, and King! The title for today’s sermon is “Real Peace”, and is from the Old Testament lesson, Jeremiah chapter 28. Let us pray...Amen.

Today is the third Sunday after Pentecost and we see the continuation of a lack of real peace in the readings. Jeremiah records it. Jesus proclaims it.

But people like peace over conflict or war.

So, Jeremiah had to deliver some difficult messages in his time. God sent Jeremiah to proclaim that God’s righteous judgment was manifesting itself in the increasing power of Judah’s enemy, the nation of Babylon. Babylon was coming. Their victory was inescapable. Along with defeat, Judah faced captivity and a long exile to a land not their own. This battle was not just between Judah and Babylon, no, Jeremiah was also telling Judah that God Himself, Yahweh was at work to judge His people and call them to repentance.

While this reading from Jeremiah can be difficult, it is really is talking about false prophets and true prophets. The issue at stake is the conflict between false prophets and true prophets, between human lies and God’s truth, is never just a theoretical exercise. In the chapter previous to today’s reading, Yahweh, God Himself instructs Jeremiah to construct and wear a yoke around his neck as a sign that God is giving Nebuchadnezzar the power to dominate all people and nations. A yoke is a piece of wood placed over the head and shoulders of an animal and then attached to a plow or cart for them to pull. The yoke Jeremiah carried was to make clear that Babylon would conquer, that the conquest was God’s will, and that any prophet who prophesied differently was simply lying. Jeremiah clearly told Zedekiah the king of Judah; **“¹⁴ Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are saying to you, ‘You shall not serve the king of Babylon,’ for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you. ¹⁵ I have not sent them, declares the LORD, but they are prophesying falsely in my name, with the result that I will drive you out and you will perish, you and the prophets who are prophesying to you.”**(Jeremiah 27:14-15)

Then, in the opening verses of chapter 28, the false prophet Hananiah confronted Jeremiah with the same false prophecy of comfort. Hananiah directly contradicted God’s Word given to Jeremiah. Hananiah proclaimed: the temple vessels would be returned, and the captive leaders of Judah would be released. In other words, according to Hananiah, God will break the king of Babylon’s yoke of power. Then, Hananiah enacted his own object lesson. Hananiah broke the yoke Jeremiah was wearing.

Yet, Jeremiah’s message was completely different: Yahweh, God Himself was on Babylon’s side using Nebuchadnezzar as an instrument of wrath and judgment. So the stage is set in today’s reading for a confrontation between prophet and prophet in the presence of the priests and all the people. It is obvious which prophetic message, Jeremiah’s or Hananiah’s, would have been more promising and attractive to the audience in Jerusalem. Hananiah was promising peace, Babylon’s power would soon be gone, and the stolen temple vessels and displaced leaders would soon return, **“within two years”**(v.3) Hananiah told them. Who would not prefer a quick and easy peace to a long drawn out war? How much more comforting it is to hear that God is on

your side, and that all your difficulties will all soon just disappear? Hananiah proclaimed Yahweh’s grace WITHOUT repentance, victory WITHOUT suffering—in effect, resurrection WITHOUT the cross.

Jeremiah wished what Hananiah said was true. He prayed for Judah. In today’s text, Jeremiah shouts, “**Amen!**” to Hananiah’s false prophecy. “**May the Lord do so; may the Lord make your words you have prophesied come true.**”(v.6) Jeremiah would like nothing better. But, Jeremiah also reminds Hananiah, and by extension us that God’s prophets are usually bearers of “bad news”. Jeremiah said, “**The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms.**”(v.8) Still in the final analysis, we recognize a true prophet by the test of whether or not what he says actually happens. “**As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet.**”(v.9)

But we chase after peace, even if it means that we need to ignore things we know we should not be ignoring. We say all is well even when we fully know it is not the case. Sometimes to maintain the peace evil is called good and good called evil. But Jeremiah and Jesus (*Matthew 10:34-42*) tell us that the life of a Christian is rarely one of peace on this earth. Our God given faith inevitably causes conflict with the world, within families, and sometimes even within ourselves. Sometimes it can be tempting to make compromises to have some temporary peace. But that path leads to death. It gives sin an opportunity, and sin really does kill. (*Ref Romans 7:11*)

But peace is not just a comfort, peace feels safe. When things change, it unsettles us. This is what keeps the young woman trapped in the abusive relationship. She knows it’s wrong and broken and unhealthy, but it’s familiar and safe in its own way. And so we refuse to change, even knowing that what exists is killing us.

But that is not really peace, is it? It is at best a smokescreen. We can avoid talking about it, but we haven’t really figured anything out? Have you ever had one of those meals when two of the people at the table have this relationship that’s just broken and they’re dealing with it by not dealing with it? It’s miserable! It is horrible! You can cut the tension with a knife. Even if we tiptoe around the topic, it’s plain that this isn’t what real peace is supposed to be. It’s no use pretending. When you do that, you live in fear. Things covered are eventually uncovered, and while we wait, they own us. We are slaves to them. It looks like peace, but it’s fake. It is destructive. False peace is deadly!

This is what Jeremiah was dealing with.

Fake peace comes with a cost. Fake peace even brings death. As long as we view life primarily as being about pursuing the appearance of peace, we live a lie. As long as our friendships are about getting along instead of loving discussion, they’re mere shadows of what they’re intended to be. As long as our relationship with God is primarily about concealing our

sin from him, concealing our sin from others, and concealing our sin from ourselves, we can't find real peace.

Repent! Again I say repent.

It is not just Jeremiah who proclaims this warning. In chapter 10 of the Gospel of St. Matthew, Jesus delivered a startling warning against superficial hopes of a superficial peace: “**Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.**”³⁵ **For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.**”³⁶ **And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.”**(Matthew 10:34-35)

Jesus speaks harsh, and un-sugar coated words.

Now we can't exactly parallel Jeremiah's words with those of Jesus because Jeremiah was required to proclaim Yahweh's judgment, while Jesus is the One who brings the sword, forces the choice of loyalty and love, and ultimately bears Yahweh's wrath Himself. The sword of judgment fell on Jesus. It was His blood, His tears, His toil, and His sweat which satisfied Yahweh's righteous judgment and brought us peace. That is NOT cheap grace, but the rich, costly freedom of Yahweh's saving love.

That is why God sent Christ into our world, not to bring peace, but a sword. The reason is real peace isn't just a matter of not actively fighting in this moment. Real peace is about having restored relationships. Godly peace is about wholeness in body, in mind, in relationships with other people, and in our relationship with God. It is without smokescreens. And God knows that true peace begins by dealing with the broken relationships that divide us from Him and isolate us from one another. It begins by calling sin a sin and repenting for our sins.

That's why Jesus says, “**Don't think I've come to bring peace, but a sword.**” He's coming to cut through that false peace, the lies, to give real peace. It is not easy. Taking a stand brings a sword. Speaking the truth will bring you into conflict with the lies our world embraces. Jeremiah felt it firsthand and things really haven't changed. If you don't believe me, just try it:

Say that every life is precious and sacred, from conception to natural death . . .

Say that human sexuality is a gift of God to be enjoyed exclusively in the context of marriage between a man and a woman . . .

Proclaim in any sense that there is an absolute right and wrong to the universe and that some actions bring life and joy and that others bring death and destruction . . .

. . . And watch the sparks start flying.

Our world is comfortable with its lies and very often willing to go to great lengths to protect its lies, but for real peace to take root, the false prophets and the lies must first be challenged, exposed, and revealed for what they really are.

And that conflict, that sword, brings true peace. When we confront the lies, we know that, ultimately, things aren't how they're supposed to be in our relationship with God. People have been fighting against God since the Fall in the Garden of Eden. But it is not just people. We've done things we shouldn't have, and we've said things we know we shouldn't have. And

sometimes, the things that own us are because we didn't act, didn't do that thing we should have, or we had that moment when we should have spoken and we kept quiet. There is simply no peace in our world, in our relationships, or in ourselves. And we extend that to our thoughts about God. How could God love someone as broken as I am? And that's the greatest lie of all. That somehow we've done too much or said too little for God to love us. That somehow we've pushed it one too many times, and this time there can't be peace. That we are too fundamentally broken even to begin to make peace with God.

And the real problem is that there's truth in that. We can't make peace with God. We try, and we fall so far short. And so some of us settle for the false peace where we just ignore the whole thing, though underneath it all we know it's not really peace at all.

But here's where the sword cuts: God Loves Us Too Much to Leave Us with a False Peace. That is why He sent Jeremiah to Jerusalem. Even more so, that is why God sent Christ Jesus, His only Son, into our world.

Through Christ, God makes real peace with us. Christ Jesus came into this world of skinned knees and broken hearts not just to bring a sword and cut through the false peace this world seeks, but to establish real peace with us.

The Son, Christ Jesus, fell on the sword, took the nails, the spear, the death of the cross to take on Himself all those reasons we are not at peace with God and are at anything but real peace with those around us. On the cross, that sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying, God-forsaken man is Emmanuel, God with us. Now He calls us by name in Baptism, and week after week He feeds us with Christ's body broken and His blood poured out. We do not have to be good enough, worthy enough, or able enough to make peace with God, because through the cross of Christ God has already made peace with us.

This is the peace that surpasses all understanding. This is the real peace Christ offers you through His death on the cross and His resurrection. This is the peace only available through Christ. It is not based on us and our actions. It is a peace secured by God Himself. So now when we confront the lies, something remarkable happens. When we lovingly deal with the things we're brushing aside and hiding from, everyone involved is set free. We exchange a false peace for the true peace Christ gives. Here in Christ we have true peace. Amen.

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