**Jeremiah 26:8-15 (ESV)**

**8** And when Jeremiah had finished speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people, then the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him, saying, “You shall die! **9** Why have you prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, ‘This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant’?” And all the people gathered around Jeremiah in the house of the Lord. **10** When the officials of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king’s house to the house of the Lord and took their seat in the entry of the New Gate of the house of the Lord. **11** Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and to all the people, “This man deserves the sentence of death, because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears.” **12** Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and all the people, saying, “The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard. **13** Now therefore mend your ways and your deeds, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will relent of the disaster that he has pronounced against you. **14**  But as for me, behold, I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you. **15** Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the Lord sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears.”

**“Preaching Pulls No Punches”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. (Galatians 1:3-5). Amen. The current trend today is to look at life as relative. This means there are no absolutes, no doctrines, and no foundations shared between others. It is like what the book of Judges states, “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (21:25). Lent uncovers the deception, the deathblow, and the darkness entrapping life today. It builds up to the point for us to hear Pontius Pilate say on Good Friday, “What is truth?” (John 18:38) This is the dismal course set for our country, churches, and families. The Lord says, “Repent, turn from your evil, walk in my Word.”

“Wait a minute don’t preach to me! Who do you think you are? What disrespect in the Lord’s house. I have sat in this holy place for years and heard plenty of preachers before you.” That is the reception Jeremiah receives still today for when he, “finished speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people, then the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him, saying, “You shall die!” Maybe, their reaction was because they were already in chaotic and uncertain times. They had witnessed the northern kingdom conquered by the Assyrians. Those left in Jerusalem could feel the decline and failure knocking at the door. Maybe they were just fed up to hear the “same old” story of repentance. But they did because the Lord loved them to the end. The last hope was in Jeremiah the prophet sent with the Lord’s Word for Israel.

Even before considering what we hear or how to react. This fact must be made known first above all. The Word of God has been sent as His act of love to save. There is no question over the value of what this means. Our Lutheran Fathers declare,

“It is not God’s will that anyone should be damned but that all men should turn themselves to him and be saved forever… To this end, in his boundless kindness and mercy, God provides for the public proclamation of his divine, eternal law and the wonderful counsel concerning our redemption, namely the holy and only saving Gospel of his eternal Son, our only Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ” (Tappert 530:49-50).

Law and Gospel. Truth and love. Repentance and forgiveness. All of it shows up by the fact of God’s Word. Preaching today finally comes out of and rests on the One who is the last best hope for sinners. As the New Testament makes clear, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son…” (1:1-2).

So if God sends His Word with love, why such a reaction to Jeremiah? They shared the reasoning for a death sentence saying, “Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, ‘This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant’?” Shiloh was to be a sign, a reminder to all of what God did in the past. This city 22 miles north of Jerusalem is where the Ark of the Covenant dwelt at one time. It was during the days of Joshua to Samuel, where God made His presence and forgiveness known in that place! However, those to whom Jeremiah brought the Word knew what had happened. They could read between the lines. Shiloh was a city in ruins. It was now a place of disgrace from times past when the people ignored God’s Word, lived in rebellion, and had unrepentant hearts. Their reaction to Jeremiah in the temple warning of judgment was not a surprise. God called His prophet saying, “They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you” (Jeremiah 1:18-19).

Many times the response we want is not what God gives by His Word. If we wish to challenge the Law, it will put us to shame. Lent teaches to examine ourselves, not by what we feel or how we picture my life but with the Law or the Ten Commandments. What is written on the hearts of men by nature, only the Word truly exposes to the full judgment rendered against sinners. As one preacher states,

“And if God is angry at unrepentant infractions against the Second table of the law which have to do with our relationship with people, how much greater is His anger at those who violate the First Table of the law which has to do with our relationship to him” (Daniel Preus, Public Square 2003.)

In other words, lacking right love for our neighbor is small compared to what lacks in our right love to God. This happens by despising His Word preached and taught, ignoring how His Name is used in my life (if I am even using it at all), and facing how false gods want to replace the only true God who saves sinners. Like with Jeremiah, the Law’s judgment still crushes with great offense. It is great as Jesus own suffering and death in our place as THE sinner. St. Paul says it well, “For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”

Even if plenty in the temple wanted to silence Jeremiah, the faithfulness of God never falls short. Whatever the cost, the last prophet to Israel kept saying, “The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard. Now therefore mend your ways and your deeds, and obey the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will relent of the disaster that he has pronounced against you. But as for me, behold, I am in your hands.” They would not spill the innocent blood of Jeremiah, though death chased after him repeatedly. He receives the title the “weeping” prophet, not merely because of his suffering, but also as a sign of God’s faithfulness. Jeremiah would see the fall of Jerusalem and be taken with the rest into exile. The remnant could still look forward to what God sent by His prophet for this promise stood true, “Behold, the days are coming , declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.”

The dismal evidence of Lent looks to the cross where God promises an Easter to come. Jesus speaks the same call of repentance wanting to make His enemies into friends. His faithfulness as Savior pours out saying, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!” Where Jeremiah wept over the devastation caused by hardhearted people against God’s Word. Jesus as the Word made flesh wept with a deeper love for a sinful world on the cross. God’s desire is to save all, including those finally lost because they want nothing do with such love made perfect in weakness.

The innocent blood of God was spilt to stop the madness of sin, death, and the Devil upon your life. Jesus longs to bring this salvation still by the promise of His Word and Sacrament. St. John tells us, “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:6-7). God pulls no punches since Jesus is the perfect preacher. He suffered, died and rose to faithfully forgive, heal the broken, and deliver us from judgment. The last and greatest hope is to believe in this Word for it rests in God’s Son, our only Savior. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.