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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 17, 2017
15th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:21-26
Hymns: 21:1-3; 421; 307; 453:2

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 15:15-21

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.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ 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?

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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.

²¹ "I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked,

And I will redeem you from the grip of the terrible." (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Conspicuous or Inconspicuous?

Inconspicuous is what I like to be a lot of the time. It is just more comfortable for me if no one knows that I'm there. Well there are times when that is the way I feel. I guess most of the time people are aware of me. I chat with total strangers. I can talk about anything, the weather of course, politics, sports, it's great to see the Twins doing as well as they are, who would have thought? The other day I noticed the young man in front of me in line at the Post Office had a Vikings lanyard for his car keys, and so of course I talked to him about how surprising the game was the night before. Sometimes I even end up talking to strangers about religion, but that might be in a hospital, or if I'm making a call somewhere and people know I'm a pastor. I don't often just start that conversation out of the blue like I do sports or weather. You see I do like to be inconspicuous. I don't wear religious garb like some clergy wear. I don't even wear message T shirts that might call attention to me as being religious. I don't care for most of them. I think they send the wrong message about me, making me look so religious. But doesn't the Lord call us to be conspicuous? Aren't we supposed to stand out in the world?

It makes me wonder though, am I hesitating because I don't want to experience the repercussions of being a conspicuous Christian?

That is exactly what Jeremiah was struggling with in our text. Jeremiah was struggling with --

**THEME: Faithfully Enduring Tribulation
in Service to the Lord.**

It should be noted and appreciated that the Holy Spirit causes the inspired record to reveal the struggles of faith that heroes of faith have endured before us that we might learn from them and be encouraged in our struggles during this earthly pilgrimage. So we learn from Jeremiah's --

I. Struggling with Enduring Reproach.

Without doubt the words of our text reveal Jeremiah's heart, that he was downcast and discouraged in his service to the Lord. But we also note that Jeremiah turned to the Lord in his struggle. He didn't shut the Lord out, but prayed for the Lord's support in his time of trouble.

Jeremiah 15:15 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.

The reminder is good for us. The Lord does know what is going on in our lives, what is going on in our hearts and minds and emotions. He knows when we are struggling. Rather than concluding that we need not turn to the Lord in our distress, we should be encouraged to turn to the Lord for help in time of need. He waits for us to turn to Him just like Jeremiah did, pouring out our hearts to the Lord.

Jeremiah had been suffering "rebuke" for the sake of the Lord. Rebuke comes across to us like a scolding, that Jeremiah got "chewed out" by someone more powerful than he was. Without doubt that went on. While Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry during the reign of a good king, Josiah, that was the last good king of Judah. Nobody wanted to hear what Jeremiah had to say. Virtually nobody liked what Jeremiah had to say; there were only a few faithful, even among the princes. For the most part Jeremiah was a prophet of doom; a prophet calling for repentance during the

last 40 years before the destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah was more than “chewed out” for what he said. He was tormented for saying what he did, even though the message was not his but the Lord’s. Jeremiah was taunted; he was isolated. He had few friends, very few indeed. He was descended from priests, but even the priests did not stand up for him. He had no friends other than Baruch, his scribe, who kept the record of Jeremiah’s prophecies.

Part of Jeremiah’s struggle was the delight that he personally found in the Word of God, and he brings that also before the Lord.

Jeremiah 15:16-17 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. ¹⁷I 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.”

Jeremiah knew the truth of God’s Word, and he did not abide by the wickedness of the nation in which he lived. He found real joy in knowing God’s truth. That is an important aspect of Jeremiah’s experience as a conspicuous child of God that we want to remember. When the world is pressing in on us, we need to find reassurance, peace, and joy in the Word, just as Jeremiah did. With the Word we will also ward off the temptations of the world and our own sinful flesh. Instead of being drawn further into the world’s way of thinking and living, we will be filled with indignation, like Jeremiah was. He saw all the idolatry, and the meanness and the pettiness, and the scheming, and yes, even murder that was prevalent in that society and its pursuit of carnal pleasure and material wealth. It made Jeremiah not just angry, but filled with righteous indignation. He condemned the sin with the vehemence of the righteousness of God’s Word.

Isn’t that what the child of God does yet today? We know the sins that corrupt our society today. We know how things have progressed according to the world’s agenda, and sexual sins have gained acceptance in the world. Indeed the twisted mind of man has put in place policies to encourage moral confusion in children and young people, and encourage and protect the murder of innocent unborn children. We don’t agree with any of that, but when we speak out, and the world retaliates with vehemence. One

hears the name calling, and even reports of violence against those who have the audacity to disagree with popular morality. We struggle with enduring the reproach of the world. It wears on the Christian, even though we are convinced, not merely by our own reason but by the Holy Spirit speaking to us through the inspired Word of God!

So we can sympathize with Jeremiah's question for the Lord:

Jeremiah 15:18 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?

Why? Why do we continue to suffer reproach from the world? Jeremiah states the question that needs to be addressed, "Is God's Word reliable or not? Are all these things going to come to pass? We are living in a spiritual desert, and seek the relief of the oasis, but it seems more like a mirage. Will the Lord ultimately deliver us from every evil, or is this more like a mirage in the desert, something we desperately crave for but it is never quite real, it's only a vision that stays just out of reach?"

God's answer set Jeremiah back on track as we read of --

II. God's Gracious Restoration.

Jeremiah 15:19-21 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. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ "I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked, And I will redeem you from the grip of the terrible."

God calls for repentance – from Jeremiah! As children of God we need daily repentance. We need it because of the weakness of the flesh that was evident in Jeremiah, that is also evident in our own lives. We need to turn around our way of thinking; thinking how unfair it is that we are suffering such wrong by enduring reproach, taunting or persecution for the sake of God's truth. So the first step

is recognizing that our thinking, our self-pity is sinful, and the second step is there in God's grace. As we by the grace of God turn away from fleshly, even worldly thinking, God in His enduring grace brings us back to the joy of our salvation and the peace that is found in the gospel. That was God's answer for Jeremiah and it is God's answer for us.

Let us heed the Lord's warning to Jeremiah. He warned Jeremiah not to go to the people, but wait for them to come to him. The Lord was warning Jeremiah against **compromising the truth**. Jeremiah had to **hold firmly to the truth** of God's Word, and wait for any who repented to come to him. He was not to seek peace by compromising the Word of God. That is still important for us today. So many church bodies have compromised the truth of God's Word for political or social expediency, you know just go with the flow of societal thought and values. They want to provide what the people want instead of the truth they need. It is the easy path, and assures the appearance of success. However, if it comforts sinners in their sin instead of bringing them to repentance and peace in the gospel the end is disastrous for souls.

The Lord promised to protect Jeremiah. The Lord promised to make Jeremiah's faith like a solid bronze wall. He was there for Jeremiah. The Lord would protect him. The Lord would deliver him. That promise of the Lord is sure. The psalmist wrote: "*God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.*" (Psalm 46:1). That was true long before Jeremiah's day, and it remains true today and forever. Even as the patriarchs, Noah, and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob found strength and deliverance in the Lord, so did the prophets and the apostles, so did Martin Luther, and so shall we.

What we have actually been talking about this morning is the cross of Christ. In our gospel lesson we learned from Jesus how He went forward to the cross, and suffered for us. He exhorted all who would follow Him to likewise take up their cross. It is far lighter than the cross Jesus endured for us. It is an honor to glorify His name before the world, and stand up for the truth of the gospel. Luther came to understand that connection. Be sure to read the paragraph at the end of the bulletin later today. May the Spirit strengthen us that we might be **conspicuous Christians** who gladly

suffer embarrassment, taunting and even shame or pain, for Jesus' sake.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.