

INI

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
October 28, 2018
23rd Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Hebrews 5:1-10, Mark 10:46-52
Hymns: 233; 798; 370; 413:5,6

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

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 31:7-9

7 For thus says the LORD:

“Sing with gladness for Jacob,
And shout among the chief of the nations;
Proclaim, give praise, and say,
‘O LORD, save Your people,
The remnant of Israel!’

8 Behold, I will bring them from the north country,
And gather them from the ends of the earth,
Among them the blind and the lame,
The woman with child
And the one who labors with child, together;
A great throng shall return there.

9 They shall come with weeping,
And with supplications I will lead them.
I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters,
In a straight way in which they shall not stumble;
For I am a Father to Israel,
And Ephraim is My firstborn. (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: (A bleak look at the world.)

When we watch the news there is little to bring one joy. The political scene has gotten so ugly, so uncivil. I know that is pretty much the nature of politics, and we are wrapping up another election season right now, but it just gets sickening doesn't it? Is there anyone who won't lie to get elected? The nation's morality is about as low as it can go. So much that is evil is defended and even celebrated. Murder and mayhem seem to rule the day. This past week we had one individual sending out pipe bombs to people he didn't like, or didn't agree with his politics. Another individual shot and killed 11 people at a Jewish synagogue. We know our country is in trouble. But it is not only our nation that is in trouble. The whole world is given over to wickedness and violence.

We hear reports of great storms and earthquakes, and although people turn out to help afterwards, man is powerless to stop these events from occurring. As great as mankind thinks itself to be, we remains puny against the forces of nature; punier still against the power of God.

God looks down from heaven upon mankind to see if there are any who do good, not by your or my or society's definition, but by the Lord's definition, for the Lord looks at the heart. Well, the Lord sees that there is none who does good, no, not one! (Psalm 14:3) So the Lord promises judgment to come upon the earth. The time of grace for this world will come to an end, an abrupt and sudden end in the Lord's time at Christ's return.

In the meantime where does that leave us but living in an evil world that is doomed to destruction. Well, we are not the first children of God to find ourselves in such a situation, and the words of the Prophet Jeremiah recorded for us in our text provide --

**THEME: The Christian's Hope while Living in a World
Doomed to Destruction.**

We are presented cause for --

I. Joyous Hope in the Face of Great Distress.

Jeremiah was a prophet of doom! That is how Jeremiah was characterized by the people of Judah. He was one of the princes of Judah and yet most of the time he had nothing good or hopeful to say. He was seen as being so very negative, even unpatriotic! Jeremiah didn't like the message he was given by the Lord, but it was necessary for him to deliver it because it was given to Him from the Lord. Yes, it was negative about society. Yes, it was negative about the fate that was about to befall the country. But it was truth, warning the people of what was to befall them, calling them to repentance. While the rest of the leaders of the people both secular and spiritual were telling to the citizens of the country not to fear that everything would be alright, all Jeremiah would say was that Babylon was going to carry them away into captivity.

What was in fact going on was that the false prophets, the unfaithful priests and the evil kings were attempting to deny the truth about the wickedness of Judah, deny the truth about the judgment of God upon evil, and instill some false hope within the people that the Lord would never actually do the things spoken by Jeremiah and the other prophets. They were discouraging the people concerning repentance. Jeremiah's job was to counter the lies with the truth that people might understand the doom and destruction that their evil sinful ways had brought upon the nation.

So, for the most part, Jeremiah was a prophet of doom; and then there are these rays of hope that the Lord presented for Jeremiah to declare, rays of hope for those few that heard the voice of the prophet and repented and were faithful to God. Our text is one of those rays of hope and it begins with this proclamation of joy and rejoicing:

Jeremiah 31:7 For thus says the LORD:
“Sing with gladness for Jacob,
And shout among the chief of the nations;
Proclaim, give praise, and say,
‘O LORD, save Your people,
The remnant of Israel!’

With these words Jeremiah was declaring a message of deliverance and salvation. There was cause for hope and joy in the Lord. The people were encouraged to turn to the Lord with songs of gladness

and cheer, seeking the Lord's grace and favor. Their prayer was to plead with the Lord that He save His people. A "Hosanna" type of prayer.

This message of hope for the people of Judah continues to be a message of hope for us yet today. Whenever we feel oppressed by the wickedness of this world, whenever we fear that the evil of this world is undermining the truth among us in our nation, we need to remember the Lord's mercies. That is where Jeremiah found his comfort and assurance and hope for the people of God; he needed to continue in his prophetic ministry under extreme adversity and opposition. In the book of Lamentations Jeremiah wrote these amazing words that shine as ray of hope for us all.

Lamentations 3:22-24 *"Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. ²³They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. ²⁴"The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!"*

Yes, the hope one finds in the mercies of God are timeless. His faithfulness to His words and promises cannot fail. When we turn to the Lord in repentance, which always includes faith in His promises of forgiveness, we find deliverance that lifts up our hearts even in life's darkest days. We look to Jesus as the Champion of our salvation. With joy in our hearts to the Lord we can sing our "Hosanna" type of prayers that the Lord would deliver us through Jesus our Redeemer. Then we shall sing our Hallelujahs!

You see, the Lord words of comfort and hope are not platitudes that bring no real solution to one's troubles. The Lord has a plan for His people which Jeremiah lays out for us in our text. It is --

II. The Promised Gathering of God's People

Our text presents a clear promise that would bring hope to the people of Judah who were staring at death and destruction, and for those who did survive, captivity in a foreign land for the rest of their days. Yet here God held out hope for the return of His people.

Jeremiah 31:8 Behold, I will bring them from the north country,

And gather them from the ends of the earth,
Among them the blind and the lame,
The woman with child
And the one who labors with child, together;
A great throng shall return there.

This message of hope was first needed by those people of Judah who saw the Babylonian armies surrounding Jerusalem, who felt the hunger and deprivation and desperation of the city being under siege. Indeed those days were as desperate as any could be, but in the face of such deep distress the Lord alone brings hope for a future. He would gather His people, and that gathering would start with the return of a remnant of Judah. However, instead of the millions that had previously occupied Judah they would be numbered in hundreds and then a few thousand. But in those words was the hope of life. Later in this same chapter Jeremiah records this promise from the Lord, *“There is hope in your future, says the Lord, That your children shall come back to their own border.”* (Jeremiah 31:17)

Even as the Lord would gather this remnant from Babylon so He would gather His people from the ends of the earth. He would lend His strength to those whom He would gather so that even women with child, or the lame would be brought safely into the fold. This gathering of people was to go way beyond the captives carried away to Babylon, including many, many more from among the Gentiles whom the Lord would free from the captivity of sin and death. He would call and gather them to be His people so that it would be a throng, a great throng of people without number.

The foundation of this hope is that the Lord would fulfill His promises of salvation in the Savior that was to come from the tribe of Judah, the Savior that would redeem us all from sin and death. The return of that remnant to Judah was a key element for this promise of the Messiah being fulfilled. It is this marvelous gospel that brings the words and promises of Jeremiah home to us, that we might cling to them as did the believers of old and find in them our hope and our joy. One of the favorite passages recorded in Jeremiah is just such a precious word of hope, precious to so many children of God who looking for hope while enduring the desperate circumstances of this life.

Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

The immediate consolation that comes to us is the assurance of God’s peace. He does not deal with us according to our sin, but according to His mercy and grace in Christ Jesus. In Christ the Lord our God has secured for us a future, a future that is far beyond anything we can imagine, a future that brings us together with all saints in our heavenly home. We often assure people especially young people that the Lord has a plan for them. Ultimately that plan is to receive us to Himself in heaven. That is our hope, the greatest of all hopes, the most certain of all hopes for it is founded upon the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We confess with Jeremiah: “*The Lord is my portion,*” says my soul, “*Therefore I hope in Him!*” ²⁵ *The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him.* ²⁶ *It is good that one should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the Lord.* (Lamentations 3:24-27)

In the meantime while we hold to this hope we make our way through this life with all its trials and tribulations, trials that may indeed confound us at times. But finally we are granted --

III. The Calm Assurance of Living under the Lord’s Guidance.

Jeremiah 31:9 They shall come with weeping,
And with supplications I will lead them.
I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters,
In a straight way in which they shall not stumble;
For I am a Father to Israel,
And Ephraim is My firstborn.”

The Lord our God is our Father in heaven. The Lord is the best of all fathers. In spite of our sins, He receives us back and embraces us with His love. The people of the Jews in the Babylonian captivity would come to the Lord with penitential tears, but also with tears of joy. So we also turn to the Lord with both penitential sorrow and tears of joy at knowing our salvation.

This picture is reminiscent of the 23rd psalm. With the Lord there is safety and security, for the Lord will lead us in the paths of righteousness. The Lord will lead us by the still waters, far away from harm and danger. That was the faith the returning remnant had to hold in their hearts as they rebuilt the temple, and rebuilt their lives in the Lord.

As we endure trials in this life we learn to lean upon our God. We learn to find our way by following where He guides and directs us with His Word. When we pick up our Bibles we hold in our hands the record of God's faithfulness. Promises of salvation have all been kept. God's people gathered. His church preserved. As we make our way through this life we see our Father's care and as we look to Jesus as Lord and Savior we follow the path that leads to eternal life. These Scriptures, like the one before us this morning are given to us that we might have hope, as St. Paul wrote to the Romans: *"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."* (Romans 15:4)

We find that hope in Jesus!

"I walk with Jesus all the way. His guidance never fails me;
Within His wounds I find a stay when Satan's power assails me;
And by His footsteps led, My path I safely tread.
In spite of ills that threaten may, I walk with Jesus all the way."

(The Lutheran Hymnal 413:5)

AMEN.

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen. (Romans 15:13)