

Sermon on Jeremiah 20, 7-13, 11.03.2007

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Text:

7 O Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughing-stock all day long; everyone mocks me. 8 For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, 'Violence and destruction!' For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. 9 If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name', then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. 10 For I hear many whispering: 'Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!' All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. 'Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him.' 11 But the Lord is with me like a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonour will never be forgotten. 12 O Lord of hosts, you test the righteous, you see the heart and the mind; let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. 13 Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.

Dear Congregation,

Jeremiah has been called from God to be a prophet, when he was 24 years of age. Now feels that he has been lured into this job, he says, he was enticed and against his own will he finds himself in this situation. It is not easy for him. *8 For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, 'Violence and destruction!'* Jeremiah has to confront his people about their ungodliness. He had to tell them that they need to be prepared for war, Death and devastation and that they would be led into exile. Initially God wanted to give them a second chance and had tried to call them to order through the preaching of the prophet. And what happened? *I have become a laughing-stock all day long; everyone mocks me,* he says. He had tried his passed and has thrown his full weight behind this task. He did not hold anything back, what God had told him to say. But the people did not honour his commitment: *For I hear many whispering: 'Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!' All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. 'Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him.'*

Like so many times in the real life the messenger gets beaten because the people dislike his message. Those who schmooze other get rewarded. The one who tells the truth loses and risks disadvantages!

The prophet suffers because of God's words which he has to deliver. Therefore deep down inside he knows: *11 But the Lord is with me like a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed.*

It sounds frustrated and distressed when Jeremiah in the end pleads God that he would bring about what he had announced: *12 O Lord of hosts, you test the righteous, you see the heart and the mind; let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.*

And in fact the disaster strikes God's people! Around the year 600 B.C. the Israelites were deported in parts to Babylon. The land is ravaged; the temple in Jerusalem is razed to the ground.

And suddenly the prophet of lamentation sings God a hymn of praise: *13 Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.*

It does sound as if he talks about him, doesn't it? Jeremiah, the one who was ridiculed and scorned is right after all.

Dear congregation,

Although this may sound like a story of old, a story which at first might have nothing to do with us today, it does not sound completely foreign to us.

I have to think of a former congregational member in Germany, who had the courage to point out unjust working-conditions and got into the hair of his boss. He did not, as many others did, close his eyes and shut his mouth. As we can know people like him are not very much liked. And those are also probably not the ones whose career goes well. Very quickly those people with legitimate motives and the courage to fight for others are seen as gripers. – And although we also in this country have legislation which protects so called ‘whistle-blowers’, those who point out injustices, it still leaves a spot on their white vest and they very often do not get any job anymore. Who wants to hire someone who has point fingers?

Another example: Since the forties there are scientists in this land who research about climate change. Since the end of the sixties we have a clear scientific proof, that the climate is changing and the greenhouse effect is real. Only now it is talked about the melting pole-caps, that the weather has gone crazy and that we have ruined our future because of our own stupidity and that irrevocably climate change will take place. Decades ago those scientists were believed to be lunatics. And some of them might sympathize with the prophet Jeremiah and might think: We’ve told you! If you only had listens to those warnings, we would not need to change things around in a rapid pace, our behaviour, and our way of life, and our politics to save what can be saved – with no guarantees that we will be able to accomplish change. Maybe 30 years down the road we have to acknowledge that it was too late and we can only watch our civilization go under.

Talking about this topic, I have watched the Al Gore documentary on climate change this week. Al Gore was the one who actually had been cheated out of being the president of the United States and now advocates for environmental awareness. I can highly recommend his movie and think that the title of this film kind of boils it down: “An Inconvenient Truth”.

The truth is always inconvenient. And this is exactly what makes people 2600 years ago to be so mad at Jeremiah. It is not his behaviour, not the way he acts or talks, not his youth, it is WHAT he says. And during the history of mankind those who actually had the courage to tell the truth for the most part suffered severely.

My idol, Dietrich Bonhoeffer for instance, did not unlike many others agree with Hitler, the Nazi regime and the persecution of Jews. What did it bring for him? He was hanged. But nevertheless, his message did not die with him. We can not even remember the name of the man that hanged him, but his books, letters and poems are still read and make people think and give them comfort – even after more than 60 years after the war has ended.

Let alone Jeremiah, who has been given a special place in history by God, and who has been made immortal because his message has been inducted in the book of books, the bible. Who of his critics, who of those who tried to kill him had expected, that his message is still read, even after 25 centuries, and is as lively as he would preach it today; a message he can deliver in the most read book of all times.

The truth always prevails. The truth always comes to light. And the truth will always be persecuted, because it contradicts the plans of those who try to hide it and to whom this truth is a threat. I often have to think of Martin Luther’s famous hymn ‘A Mighty Fortress Is Our God’ in which he has rhymed in one verse: ‘One little word subdues him...’ One message, one sentence, one word is enough at times and those who feel do powerful and invincible are overcome.

Dear congregation, more than ever we need this prophetic element in this world and in the church. We need people like Jeremiah, who are not guided by personal interests, but by the will to present the truth. We need

especially young people, who give us older a talking-to and finally change the pitiful circumstances of this world which are by far worse, more violent and inhuman as they have been in the times of the prophet. Sometimes I ask myself whether as some point God, who has promised that this world will not cease, and that he is going to with us until the end of the earth, our God whom we believe to be our Father, who forgives all of us, that our God finally could pack-up, loose his temper and say: Enough. That's it! Free will or not, if you destroy everything anyway I will end this right here and right there."

Sometimes I am afraid that God stops to intervene and lets us go on in our endless foolishness until the last one of our species can switch off the lights. This has become a greater possibility. And even those who have said it is five minutes before twelve already say, it is five minute after.

But still, when those fears get me I try to see that God always has been standing at the side of his naughty and ignorant children, has awakened people like Jeremiah who have shaken up people and brought about the grace of God.

And when I think about it, it can not be that to save this world and do good to others is only the task of an elected few who have been called to do it. The truth, the sincerity, the faithfulness towards God to be his witness in this world, is a task which we all have.

God has called all of us and has for everyone a task to do. We should heed God's call. I think this is the least we can do, that we answer the call of the creator and sustainer and father of all and take it upon us to serve him. It is not good, if we bail out of it. It is our duty. Listen: *"9 If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name', then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.*

It does not have to be a prophetic vocation which God has in store for us, although almost everything we do in his name bears some proclamation of his truth in it – even if we do this without using any words. We are Christ's ambassadors; information signs for God; servants of the gospel. And I sometimes feel that we take this God's claim too carelessly.

We like to take the assurance, the comfort, the love of God, but the claim he has expressed as well for instance through words the Apostle Paul wrote, we do not like to hear much about (I. Corinthian. 1:30): *"Jesus Christ, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption"*

The Theological Declaration of Barmen explained it this way:

As Jesus Christ is God's assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, so in the same way and with the same seriousness is he also God's mighty claim upon our whole life. Through him befalls us a joyful deliverance from the godless fetters of this world for a free, grateful service to his creatures.

We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords—areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him (Thesis two)

The time of the apathy and egoism must come to an end; and the age of the prophecy and begin of humanity has to begin. Amen.

And the Peace of God which passes all understanding, may keep our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.