

WELCOME 16th June 2024 – 4th Sunday after Pentecost '24 B

Jeremiah 38:1-13

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs/GPs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & farther out into his world to you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups** on Friday @ 1p.m.

As we move into this week... Superheroes. We love 'em. Obviously larger than life, they're an escape from the bad news crowding our days & in the same way offer hope that one day good will triumph over evil. The Bible too has its superheroes: **Moses, David, Esther**, Paul...giants of faith who again loom larger than life and against whom we feel small & insignificant.

And yet the Bible is filled w/ the lives, faith & sometimes the names of the smaller heroes whose presence is hidden in the shadows of the more well-known. But it is **THEIR** faithful service & generous compassion, **THEIR** courage & boldness, & **THEIR** willingness to stand against evil or injustice that furthers God's plan of redemption for the world.

So when you feel you're nothing special; when all you see in the mirror is a common, ordinary, insignificant person, be encouraged by someone like you: a common person w/ an uncommon heart, whose uncommon courage is pivotal in the unfolding of God's saving plan. Their name may not be up in lights or remembered by the world, but who are every bit God's chosen superhero. Today...Ebed-Melek.

"My lord the king," Ebed-Melek said,

*"these men have done a very evil thing in putting Jeremiah the prophet into the cistern.
He will soon die of hunger, for almost all the bread in the city is gone."*

Doing what's right when the risk is high or the cost great...going against the flow for what God has said...trusting God when others won't... You may not think of yourself as heroic or a person of influence but... acting in spite of fear...living courageously...

Stand where you are, speak what is true, & act with compassion; all for others...
and all around us lives **WILL** be changed

We'll experience & share that today...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord Jesus you promised the Spirit's words when we are offered a chance to share your triumphant grace...Now, today & every day give your Spirit complete control of our hearts, hands & lips so that all we are and all we do is devoted to making you visible in this world through our lives and in our words. Shape us into your perfect image so that even at our final breath we speak as you spoke & offer grace even to our enemies.
In Jesus' Name...Amen!

Let's hear God's Word

FAITH CHAT:

1. Have you ever done something intentionally different from what people around you were doing?
(You chose to do what was right when others didn't)
2. What might that look like for you in today's world or a current situation?

4 PENTECOST '24 B – LIVING COURAGEOUSLY: EBED-MELEK

Francis Schaeffer...Xn pastor, teacher, evangelical superstar...was uncomfortable in being seen for his huge impact for Christ in the world. Like Luther he didn't run from the spotlight, but didn't revel in it either...He wrote: "We all tend to emphasize big works & big places, but all such emphasis is of the flesh. To think in such terms is simply to harken back to the old, unconverted, egoist, self-centered Me. This attitude, taken from the world, is more dangerous to the Christian than fleshly amusement. It is the flesh."

To exalt "ME" is dangerous! It's an indulgence in the old sinner...let that settle in your heart some...

It's true...our world values **BIG**...I actually was mentored for a while by a pastor who followed the old "Go **BIG** or go home!" motto. I sometimes hear myself say "I pastor a small church here in Wagga" when I know we are **EXACTLY** the average size of a Xn church in Australia & **ABOVE** avg size for a Lutheran church. I've fought hard against the "just" mindset..."I'm just a housewife - just a secretary - just a janitor - groundskeeper - farmer..." *GRRR!* I hate that! I was chatting w/ a PhD student in biomedical science who describes their work as being in "immunology & cancer therapies...I'm not a medical doctor just a biotechnologist." *See it? "JUST."* Makes me crazy...**JUST** a biotechnologist...as if that's of lesser value.

Our world values **BIG**...showy...impressive...flashy...credentials... Nobel Prize winners from your University...or Band 6s from your High School. Patrick Swayze! & Gangsters Our world values **BIG**...& all that goes along w/ that. God's people were no different. Some of the saddest words in Scripture come from just such a desire for the **BIG**: "Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have." That's the elders of Israel speaking to God's prophet Samuel...even when Samuel warns them what God says will happen...having a king will end in tears they say, "Even so, we still want a king," they said. "We want to be like the nations around us. Our king will judge us & lead us into battle." - **1 Sam 8:4, 19-20** Our world values **BIG**...& all that goes along w/ that.

We know what comes next: Saul, David, Solomon...all of whom had issues...then a **divided** kingdom & 19/19 bad leaders to the North & 12/20 unfaithful leaders to the South. Zedekiah was the last king of the Southern Kingdom: Judah. Zedekiah had been appointed as Judah's king by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. The Babylonians had beaten Judah's armies so soundly they became a vassal state owing allegiance to Babylon. A bunch of political intrigue & unfaith later Zedekiah is plonked down on the throne & told by Nebuchadnezzar to behave himself. He's a coward... weak & easily swayed & rebels against Babylon, who again invade...this time promising utter annihilation.

Over/over again, the prophet Jeremiah spoke God's word: "This is what the Lord says: 'Everyone who stays in Jerusalem will die from war, famine, or disease, but those who surrender to the Babylonians will live. Their reward will be life. They will live!' It was a straightforward word: Surrender, trust God to make things right, restore you & live. But to fight against Babylon was to fight against God's judgment for your sin & you can't win either of those. Surrender, trust God to make things right, restore you & live. When you have a clear word from God you have a clear word from God. "This is what the Lord God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'If you surrender...to the king of Babylon, your life will be spared & this city will not be burned down; you & your family will live. But if you will not surrender...this city will be given into the hands of the Babylonians & they will burn it down; you yourself will not escape from them.'"

But of course, those who are convinced they know better than God have other plans: **So** the officials went to Zedekiah & said, "Sir, this man must die! That kind of talk will undermine the morale of the few fighting men we have left, as well as that of all the people. This man is a traitor!" Their political agenda (military morale & opinion of the masses) stands above their obedience to God's agenda for his people...obedience, faith, discipline... The problem is **NEVER** that God is silent. The issue is **NEVER** that we don't have a trustworthy word from God about our circumstance. The question is always, "Will we obey what God commands of us? Will we live in accord w/ what God tells us?" "All right," Zedekiah said. "Do as you like. I can't stop you." We know **his** answer...

Did I mention Zedekiah was weak...a coward...easily swayed...whichever way the pressure pushed that's his direction. Governs w/ a finger in the wind. Whoever had the ear of the king steered the ship of state. So Jeremiah ends up sunk in a drying cistern. Water mostly gone & under siege, the city is quickly running out of food. **BUT at that exact place stands** Ebed-Melek: the outsider's outsider. An African among Jews. A slave among people trapped in their own city. Religiously excluded from the Temple. He was a "nobody." ^{w/in} the context of Hebrew culture, Ebed-Melek counted for nothing. **BUT NB:** Jeremiah had been called by God to speak for God TO THE NATIONS...to call those not yet part of God's people to the promises God was bestowing on ALL people "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." - **Jer 1:5** Ebed-Melek is perhaps the firstfruits of Jeremiah's ministry.

So Ebed-Melek does what no one in Jerusalem will do. He valued the life of God's prophet as much as he prized the truth of God's Word. Even when the whole world was arrayed against him, he had the courage to do what was right. *Ebed-melek rushed from the palace to speak with Zedekiah. "My lord the king," he said, "these men have done a very evil thing in putting Jeremiah the prophet into the cistern. He will soon die of hunger, for almost all the bread in the city is gone."*

Remember...city is going to fall. God says so...their sins have caught up w/ them... There is no escape. But just because you don't like what God says, it is still evil to attack God's prophet. Just because you don't like what God says does not excuse you from the necessity of obedience. Just because what God has said is hard to accept or inconvenient; fighting against it is wicked. Living in opposition to God's word is evil. While obedience will be scary, uncomfortable & does not eliminate the pain of exile, it lessens the extent of the destruction. While obedience may be costly, difficult, risky (even painful), only obedience sets the stage for the blessings to come. **If you surrender...***to the king of Babylon, your life will be spared & this city will not be burned down; you & your family will live.*

So Ebed-Melek does what is right...takes 30 men from the king's guard, gathers ropes & rags & in compassion lifts Jeremiah from the cistern so he can continue to do what God has called him to do...continue to be who God has commissioned him to be. Ebed-Melek is driven by 2 primary concerns... commitment to God's word & compassion for God's people...especially his servant Jeremiah & enables Jeremiah to go on declaring God's judgment **AND** God's promise of restoration. Jeremiah is still a prisoner. Exile still happens. **Even** when you can't fix you can be faithful.

It's weird...if you were to list names from the Bible...we'd all spot Jeremiah but Ebed-Melek we might skim over as maybe the guy who runs the kebab shop on Morgan St. He's nobody's 1st choice for hero. But it is **HIS** faithful service & generous compassion **HIS** courage & boldness & **HIS** willingness to stand against evil & injustice that furthers God's plan of redemption for the world. When Ebed-Melek lives courageously he enables Jeremiah to go on declaring God's judgment **AND** God's promise of restoration. **HIS** name may not be up in lights or remembered by the world, but **HE IS** every bit God's chosen superhero.

So when you feel you're nothing special; when all you see in the mirror is a common, ordinary, insignificant person, be encouraged by someone like you: a common person w/ an uncommon heart, whose uncommon courage is pivotal in the unfolding of God's saving plan. Always remember...

God uses what you have to fill a need which you never could have filled.
God uses where you are to take you where you never could have gone.
God uses what you can do to accomplish what you never could have done.
God uses who you are to craft you into who you never could have been.

That's the power of the risen Jesus at work in your life by his Spirit setting up divine opportunities that not only change individual lives, but impact the world according to God's purpose & plan.

God leads us into every circumstance & every encounter of our lives UNDER his influence FOR his influence. Because of God's hand upon us at all times & His presence within us at all times...You can

Do what's right when the risk is high or the cost great...go against the flow for what God has said...trust God when others won't... You may not think of yourself as a person of influence but... acting in spite of fear...

Stand where you are, speak what is true, & act with compassion; all for others... and all around us lives **WILL** be changed.

TAKE IT HOME-

What will you do this week to lift someone up or enable them to live out God's purpose for them?

Let's pray w/ that in mind...*Gracious Father, your Son Jesus, died for us all. By your Spirit make us obedient to go where you send us, say what you tell us & do what needs doing in every divine appointment w/ others you have already set up. Through Jesus Christ we pray...Amen.*