

WELCOME 14th July 2024 – 8th Sunday after Pentecost '24 B

Jeremiah 2:1-13 & 19

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. That link will be on the web page by about Wednesday.

As we move into this week... 'Rebellion.' The word puts a specific picture in mind. Chaos. Disorder. Intentionally damaging. Violence in pursuit of some perceived "higher" goal. A deep seated belief that the rebels are on the right side of history.

The Bible understands it differently...more concisely...more personally.

Rebellion is to reject God as being in charge...Rebellion is to reject God's Word as the final, highest word... Rebellion is to claim final authority for oneself **AND** to be a rebel is to be on the **wrong** side of history & life itself. To pursue rebellion against God is to choose death over life...emptiness over abundance...scarcity over fullness.

It's easy to point the finger at someone else's rebellious spirit, attitude or behaviour, but Jeremiah was not sent to "other people." He was sent to God's own people... people just like us. God's word always confronts **US** with our own rebellion & sin. Then it assures us of what God has done about our sin while we were still rebels:

Your wickedness will bring its own punishment.

Your turning from me will shame you.

You will see what an evil, bitter thing it is to abandon the Lord your God & not fear him.

*I, the Lord, the Lord of Heaven's Armies, have **spoken!***

But God showed his great love for us

by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners...

For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son

while we were still his enemies,

*we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. – **Rom 5:8 & 10***

The Father offers himself to us as Life-Giver; everything else is a life-stealer.

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

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father your voice sounds into our lives again today. Speak to us clearly for on too many days we hear other voices—voices urging us to care only about ourselves; urging us to serve other gods: work, bank balances, egos, peer groups, or ideologies. By the end of the week, we feel trapped in our anxiety, our work, our spending, our need for control, & our excuses. Then we hear your voice again, calling us to your healing care, to your spacious freedom, to your giving humility. We come to rest & be fed. Call us to your freeing love again. Feed us now, God of our strength. In Jesus' Name we pray...Amen.

Let's hear God's Word

FAITH CHAT:

1. Describe a time when you made a really bad choice between multiple alternatives? How would you avoid making a similar mistake again?
2. When you consider the effect of sin in our world today, what for you is most grief-inducing? (just makes you profoundly sad)

8 Pentecost '24 B – FULLY ENGAGED: IN REBELLION

If you blinked you would have missed it...The Portal...was an interactive performance art & cultural exhibit...basically an open-air video link connecting Dublin, Ireland & Midtown Manhattan in New York City. It was hoped that by linking the 2 cities in real time in a real visual way, that some real sense of common humanity might be fostered & some real goodwill built across the great Atlantic divide. That was the hope.

It was temporarily shut down in less than a week. Why? Well...on one side some women lifted their shirts & in reply some men dropped their pants. There were more than a few 1 & 2-finger salutations beamed across the world & some bright spark in Dublin dialed up video of the planes crashing into the World Trade Center Towers on September 11th 2001 & held up his phone for the folks in New York to relive the most horrifying day in US history. It has since reopened with more security in place & I suspect a set of lowered expectations.

I would have thought the coarse raw vulgarity of those first few days was an **OBVIOUS** outcome to an unsecured open internet camera lens. We see it far too often. How many “on the street” news reports are interrupted by someone dumping a beer on the reporter’s head or walking up to the young lady with the microphone & giving her a kiss on the cheek...or worse. Every once in a while we still see someone bust out of the stands completely naked running across the field at the Footy Grand Finals or down the fairway at a Major Golf Tournament. The language of the pub is now common in the school yard...& I don’t mean the teachers! ;-) What in **OUR** childhoods would have been **UNTHINKABLE** is now **UNREMARKABLE**. Sadly, the same was true among God’s people in Jeremiah’s day. The effects of sin...are profoundly heartbreaking

Last Sunday we looked at Jeremiah’s call to speak for God to a nation & a time that had turned their backs on God & his promises for their future. Jeremiah was called, in much the same way we are...to point to God’s design & intention for our lives to be lived in relationship to him...attentive, responsive & obedient to his word for the carrying out of his purposes here...to live in a love we could not have earned responsive to the God we cannot overthrow.

For Jeremiah, & for all of the Old Testament prophets, that meant pointing back to the Exodus...that specific event centuries previous in the lives of their people when God had freed them from brutal grinding slavery, led them for 40 years through the wilderness providing for every need & then conquering for them the land that God had declared would be their home in perpetuity if only they would live in accord with his commands...the Law he had given them at Mt Sinai.

“I remember how eager you were to please me as a young bride long ago, how you loved me & followed me even through the barren wilderness. In those days Israel was holy to the Lord, the first of his children. All who harmed his people were declared guilty, & disaster fell on them.” 2:2-3 God starts by reminding his people what their life together used to be like. God says “I remember” & implicitly the question is “Do you?” If you read through the OT you’ll find countless references to God’s mighty work in the Exodus. God is forever reminding his people that he led them by the hand out of slavery into the freedom of his promises, the promised land & the security of his presence & asks again/again “Do you remember how I parted the Red Sea, marched you safe through the middle & buried Pharaoh’s army beneath the waves? Do you remember...for that whole time it was just us & every need you had I supplied?” **Do you remember?** That’s all God wants to know. It wasn’t always easy but it was always just us...*Do you remember?*

Because if you remember what God has done for you in the past...if you can remember a time when God stepped in...provided, protected, led or comforted... the next question ought to be easy: **What** did your ancestors find wrong with me that led them to stray so far from me? They worshiped worthless idols, only to become worthless themselves. Like a heart-broken/jilted spouse, God asks, “What did I do wrong? If you remember everything I have done for you...where did I mess up?” This is an astonishing question from God! He who claimed this people for his bride now bares his broken heart over their unfaithfulness...his unfailing covenant of love had been thrown in the dirt. God asked about their memory. How’s yours?

Martin Luther called baptism the sacrament to which we return every day. We mark ourselves with the sign of the cross remembering it is not **WE** who create a relationship with God but God who reaches into this world through the life, death, & resurrection of Jesus to make us his own. It is God who unites us to the forgiving death of Jesus & then raises us to life with him – life that never ends. And we dare not forget it is that baptism that calls us into a living daily experience of God’s presence, power, love, peace & joy where his word nourishes us & bears fruit outward through us so that others might be drawn in to this same saving life-changing abundance of life in Christ.

God’s question is rhetorical & the answer self-evident: God committed no wrong in the relationship. But Israel has forgotten that their very existence as a people is dependent on the love that drew them from bondage/death to freedom/life. In all of this God through Jeremiah reminds his hearers that it is not God who has changed - his love, provision, & grace, has not faltered one whit. It is they who have turned

from him. In their forgetfulness they have gone after other gods – other securities – other allegiances – other devotions – other trusts – other hopes & aspirations...

They worshiped worthless idols, only to become worthless themselves. To cling to vain, fleeting, worthless, or empty things is to fill yourself with worthlessness/emptiness. *The idols of the nations are merely things of silver & gold, shaped by human hands. They have mouths but cannot speak, & eyes but cannot see. They have ears but cannot hear, & noses but cannot smell. Those who make idols are just like them, as are all who trust in them.* Ps 135:15-18

Israel & Judah had not only turned to false pagan gods but they also looked to political allegiances & alliances to bolster their military strength & give them security. They discovered the emptiness/worthlessness of everything they relied on & became empty nations...Israel was overthrown & gone forever...Jeremiah said the people of Judah were on the same road to ruin. The people simply stopped following God...they quit listening...quit trusting...quit obeying. We've noted before that when people stop following God, they don't stop being followers; they just follow something else. The old saying "When people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing, they just believe in anything" is absolutely true. What is the 21st century if it isn't that very mindset...I can do it on my own. I'm doing just fine by myself. I work hard I have everything I need. I'll do what I want...I have no need for God...I can save the planet or oceans or reef or myself...

Jesus said **Apart** from me you can do nothing" & that literally means apart from Jesus we **BECOME** nothing. Whenever we allow something other than Jesus Christ to be at the centre of our lives or we seek to be or discover our own source of life, hope, fulfillment or satisfaction, we are in danger of infidelity - of this sort of unfaithfulness – of that sort of worthlessness/emptiness...You literally become like what you worship. You become the spitting image of what controls your heart, hopes, & desires. If the life & work of Jesus drives how you live...you worship & follow Jesus...you become more like him. If you worship what's worthless, you become worthless. You become as superficial as fashion...as hollow as entertainment...as fleeting & fading as a bank balance. We all become like what we worship. **What** you pursue...you become...& if "self" is at the heart of your pursuits, self is all you have until death destroys self. Then you have nothing.

The people did not ask, 'Where is the Lord...'...The priests did not ask, 'Where is the Lord?' They failed from top to bottom...from the palace to the Temple to the houses in the countryside...They lived as if God did not exist & did not have a claim on their lives. But we have to keep in mind...It's easy to spot "the speck" in someone else's eye; to point the finger at the rebellious spirit, attitude or behaviour of other people, but

Jeremiah was not sent to "other people." He was sent to God's own people... people just like us. Jeremiah is to remind them that what makes God's people special is God's presence among them, & to diminish Him to make light of his power in their lives to act as if God is of no substance is to fail at our call & His will to attract the world into life with him. Exactly what they had done.

For my people have done two evil things: They have abandoned me — the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all! Choosing anything over God is an insane exchange. Whatever you put in God's place will not only **not** deliver, it will drain life from you...like a cracked cistern that can't hold water. God in Christ alone satisfies. If you attach your heart or your hopes to anything else, you will never be satisfied. Instead...you'll find disaster.

But look closely...In spite of their infidelities, God calls Israel 'my people.' Even now God does not want simply to terminate the relationship. Even now, despite their sin, God will not give up on his beloved. Even now, there is hope for the nation. This hope, is rooted & grounded in the nature & heart of our loving God. It will not fail. In Jeremiah's prophecies, Israel's hope is as sure as its doom. Hope like this is ever present: encouraging us to trust God no matter what the way before us holds. "This hope is a strong & trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary. Jesus has already gone in there for us." Heb. 6:19-20

Even now, despite our sin & failing God does not give up on us...but promises us hope large as all eternity...God will not relinquish his grip on us & in Jesus Christ anchors our lives securely in the heart of God's love for His creation & the hope of his kingdom revealed here among us. God's word always confronts **us** with our own rebellion & sin. Then it assures us of what God has done about our sin while we were still sinners: **Your** wickedness will bring its own punishment. Your turning from me will shame you. You will see what an evil, bitter thing it is to abandon the Lord your God & not fear him. I, the Lord, the Lord of Heaven's Armies, have spoken!

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners...For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. – Rom 5:8 & 10
The Father offers himself to us as Life-Giver; everything else is a life-stealer.

TAKE IT HOME: In what one area of your life might God be calling you out of "rebellion" & into obedience or greater trust in him?

Let's pray together...**Father prepare me for whatever you require today and lead me in faith wherever you call me to go. In Jesus' Name...Amen.**