

WELCOME 21st July 2024 – 9th Sunday after Pentecost '24 B

Jeremiah 3:11-15 & 7:1-15

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... 'Oh it seems to me...so it seems to be...**Sorry** seems to be the hardest word' Elton John's 1976 hit hit the nail on the head. The hardest words ever to cross our **lips**... "I'm sorry. I apologize."

But you know what's harder still? **TO MEAN IT**...to turn those words into real change. Changed life choices...a new direction...transformed day-to-day behaviour. Harder than uttering the words is to acknowledge the guilt & become devoted to live & be different.

To change course, direction, goals & destination for your life is to be *FULLY ENGAGED IN REPENTANCE*. Repentance involves a changed heart **AND** changed behaviour.

O *Israel, my faithless people, come home to me again, for I am merciful.
I will not be angry with you forever.*

Only acknowledge your guilt. Admit that you rebelled against the Lord your God...

It's a turning back to the only way that leads to fullness of life in relationship with God & with others. A life birthed in forgiveness, restored by grace, rebuilt with love, and renewed in hope toward his promise of life in all its fullness....

A world without God has no place to lay its guilt or shame.

Jesus says, "Give them to me."

*If we confess our sins to him, God is faithful & just
and will forgive our sins & to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. – 1 Jn 1:9*

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

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Living God of past and future, we praise you for this present moment. Fill us with your joy and empower us with your Holy Spirit, that our strength may be renewed to sing a new song of your love & mercy in a world which longs for your justice and peace. Bring to our mind the ways we have chosen our will over yours & then amend our hearts to follow you alone. All this we ask in the name of Jesus, in whom we become your new creation. Amen.

Let's hear God's Word

FAITH CHAT:

1. Why are "I'm sorry or I apologize" such difficult words for us to say?
2. What does God promise when we say those words to Him?
What do people who have no belief in God do with regard to guilt or shame?

9 Pentecost '24 B – FULLY ENGAGED: IN REPENTANCE

“Mistakes were **made**” You’ve heard that before...about gov’t projects suffering cost blowouts/increasing delays...from an airline that can’t keep its flights on schedule...or a builder whose project just fell down...or a gov’t security force that can’t keep the leading presidential candidate safe...Like **“the dog ate my homework”** it’s a non-apology apology...an excuse to avoid accountability...a duck & dodge routine that shifts the focus from some **one** to the mysterious forces of **“mistakes.”** Just like when someone says, **“If you were offended, that wasn’t my intention & I’m sorry you feel that way.”** *It’s not my fault you see...it’s YOUR FEELINGS that are the problem.*

Repentance, is something completely different. I know I’ve shared ^{1/4} **that** repentance *μετανοεια* is a nautical word. It means **“Turn** around! Change course! There’s danger ahead”. Imagine being the lookout on the Titanic & seeing icebergs **as** large as skyscrapers blanketing the sea. You’d scream “repent” pretty loudly & mean absolutely nothing about morals, ethics, or faith...you’d hope the engines would go to “reverse” & the rudder turn fully to avoid a collision & a new course plotted by the captain. The OT prophets, one & all, were like that lookout. They knew, from God’s own voice that God’s own people were on a road to ruin & that needed to change. We know that story...how it never seemed to last...

Jeremiah’s ministry lasted just over 40 years...Imagine a declaring single message for 40 yrs & having nearly no one take you seriously & alter their course. What I find sad, & I know broke Jeremiah’s heart is that for a time he wasn’t alone in trying to right the ship called Judah...the southern kingdom of God’s people Israel. In the 1st 20 chapters there are 2 “time stamps” that help us locate his ministry in history. We saw his call 2 weeks ago: *The Lord first gave messages to Jeremiah during the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah.* – Jer 1:2 Again just ^{1/4} today’s text: ⁶ *During the reign of King Josiah, the Lord said to me, “Have you seen what fickle Israel has done? Like a wife who commits adultery, Israel has worshiped other gods on every hill & under every green tree. I thought, ‘After she has done all this, she will return to me.’ But she did not return, & her faithless sister Judah saw this. She saw that I divorced faithless Israel because of her adultery. But that treacherous sister Judah had no fear, & now she, too, has left me & given herself to prostitution. Israel treated it all so lightly—she thought nothing of committing adultery by worshiping idols made of wood & stone. So now the land has been polluted. But despite all this, her faithless sister Judah has never sincerely returned to me. She has only pretended to be sorry. I, the Lord, have spoken!”* ¹¹ *Then the Lord said to me, “Even faithless Israel is less guilty than treacherous Judah!”* – Jer 3:6-11 There it is...Josiah is king when Jeremiah is called to be fully engaged in speaking for God to God’s people. Why does that matter?

Well...Josiah’s name should ring a bell...He was a great faithful king. Beyond compare. But remember his grandfather Manasseh & his father Amon were scoundrels. Manasseh reigned 55 yrs & Amon 2...So for 57 yrs Judah was led into idolatry, rampant street-level violence, political chaos & religious & moral debauchery BY HER LEADERS...Think Harold Holt (Oz PM 1966-67) & then every PM, parliamentarian, judge, mayor & police chief since being completely corrupt...That’s the situation Josiah inherits & where Jeremiah begins. **NB:** Israel is no more...Overrun by Assyria & gone forever & even seeing that & hearing the call to turn back to Yahweh... Judah, according to God himself, is worse!

Josiah courageously & faithfully introduced reforms aimed at restoring obedience to God. He & those who were his closest advisors stripped the pagan altars, idols & worship places from Judah. He reinstated the sacrifices & worship practices God had commanded. He receives the highest praise of any king: *Never before had there been a king like Josiah, who turned to the LORD with all his heart & soul & strength, obeying all the laws of Moses. And there has never been a king like him since.* – 2 Kgs 23:25 **But** *despite all this, her faithless sister Judah has never sincerely returned to me. She has only pretended to be sorry. I, the Lord, have spoken!”* *Then the Lord said to me, “Even faithless Israel is less guilty than treacherous Judah!”* The hardest words ever to cross our lips? “I’m sorry. I apologize.” Harder still? **TO MEAN IT**...to turn words into real change. Changed life choices...a new direction...transformed day-to-day behaviour. Harder than saying the words is to acknowledge the guilt & become devoted to live & be different. Israel didn’t & Judah wasn’t. Judah was faking it...It seems folks went along w/ Josiah’s reforms...but they were going through the motions. When his reign ended, so did the revival. And you see...God knew it all along.

Teachers know when a student is putting in the time w/o putting in the effort. Sports coaches know. Employers know if a worker is just mailing it in. Spouses know. God knows if our hearts aren’t really here...watching the clock...smiling politely...token effort... God knows. But what God has desired from forever is our lives, as his beloved children, to reflect that love & devotion...that single-hearted faith & trust in him so the world would see it & be drawn to him as well. God would say: *“O Israel,” says the Lord, “if you wanted to return to me, you could. You could throw away your detestable idols & stray away no more. Then when you swear by my name, saying, ‘As surely as the Lord lives,’ you could do so with truth, justice, & righteousness. Then you would be a blessing to the nations of the world, & all people would come & praise my name.”* – Jer 4:1-2 *you could say you were my people & actually look like it...be telling the truth.”* To respond to grace, mercy & unfailing love received w/ lives of faith worship generosity compassion reflecting that love & devotion...single-hearted faith & trust in him so the world would see it & be drawn to him as well. *Then you would be a blessing to the nations of the world AND all people...*

God's people have from forever been destined to be a channel of blessing from God to the nations of the world. Gen 12:1-3 but because of their unfaithfulness they have become an object lesson in God's wrath not his blessing. The same is true for the church in any age...when we fake it...go through the motions...substitute religious duty for righteous love...fight over trivia & remember the fights of the past instead of forgiving & restoring...When we excuse awful behaviour & don't say "no" to that which Scriptures condemn...**AND YET**...God calls us to himself in the language of love. **"my faithless people, come home to me again...Return home, you wayward children...Even now, if you quit your evil ways, I will let you stay in your own land..."** God loves enough to hurt over our sin & loves enough to discipline, correct, punish & rebuke us for it. God takes no pleasure in human suffering or in punishing human sinfulness. But his holiness calls us into his righteousness. When we reject that call...the pain of God's discipline is the result. Free rein is not love. "Do as you please" makes no place "home."

Genuine faith...real repentance is always an exchange. God gives all of himself to us & in return asks for all of you/me. *O LORD, I give my life to you...Show me the right path, O LORD; point out the road for me to follow. Lead me by your truth & teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you.* – Ps 25:1 & 4-5 - For our sake God made Him who knew no sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. – 2 Cor 5:21 Genuine faith...real repentance is always an exchange. God gives all of himself to us & in return asks for all of you/me.

Do you really think you can steal, murder, commit adultery, lie, & burn incense to Baal & all those other new gods of yours, then come here & stand before me in my Temple & chant, "We are safe!"—only to go right back to all those evils again? Don't you yourselves admit that this Temple, which bears my name, has become a den of thieves? Surely I see all the evil going on there. I, the Lord, have spoken! We easily turn grace into an excuse for sin...a get out of jail free card that calls for nothing in return. The people in Jeremiah's day did just that by acting as if the temple granted them **NOT** safety from wrath **but safety to sin w/o wrath**. It's what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace." Cheap grace is grace w/o discipleship, grace w/o the cross, grace w/o Jesus Christ...forgiveness w/o the call to repentance...They flocked to the temple, but their lives were a debacle...debauched...& would be destroyed. God was willing to destroy the temple because his people treated it like a good luck charm...it had become an idol to them. They trusted in it rather than in Him, so He would destroy it **AND** them. *I will send you out of my sight into exile, just as I did your relatives, the people of Israel.*

Throughout his ministry Jeremiah declares the totality of the destruction wrought by the invading Babylonian armies. In Chap 4 Jeremiah has a vision in which Jerusalem is seen as barren as the day ^{b/4} the 1st day of creation Dark – no people – no animals – ruin so total the

formless/void returns... *I looked at the earth, & it was empty & formless. I looked at the heavens, & there was no light. I looked at the mountains & hills, & they trembled & shook. I looked, & all the people were gone. All the birds of the sky had flown away. I looked, & the fertile fields had become a wilderness. The towns lay in ruins, crushed by the LORD's fierce anger.* Jer 4:23-26 But formless/void is not intended as the last word...**"O Israel, my faithless people, come home to me again, for I am merciful. I will not be angry with you forever. Only acknowledge your guilt. Admit that you rebelled against the Lord your God..."**

"Return home, you wayward children," says the Lord, for I am your master. (husband) I will bring you back to the land of Israel — one from this town & two from that family — from wherever you are scattered. And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will guide you with knowledge & understanding."

It's a turning back to the only way that leads to fullness of life in relationship with God & with others. A life birthed in forgiveness, restored by grace, rebuilt with love, and renewed in hope toward his promise of life in all its fullness...A world that says mistakes were made...I'm sorry you were offended...that never turns sorry into being different...is a world that has it's back turned on the Father...has rejected the God who has a destiny for our lives & a way to live that destiny today.

A world without God has no place to lay its guilt or shame.

Jesus says, "Give them to me."

If we confess our sins to him, God is faithful & just and will forgive our sins & to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. – 1 Jn 1:9

TAKE IT HOME:

Where is God speaking today about your life & what needs to be turned back to him?

How can you make repentance a daily holy habit in your life?

Let's pray...

Lord Jesus you held nothing back, not even your own life so that we could belong to you as loved children of the Father. Call us back to you today so that we hold nothing back from you or the work of your kingdom. Let us excel in the fruit of your spirit with lives that reflect your unfailing love in all we are & do. Teach us to live solely from our trust in you. We pray this in your name Lord Jesus Christ... Amen