

WELCOME 11th August 2024 – 12th Sunday after Pentecost '24 B

Jeremiah 20:7-18

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. **NO ZOOM THIS WEEK...**

As we move into this week...Between a rock & a hard place...AKA Catch-22 is to have to choose between two equally undesirable outcomes. You sense there's no-win whichever way you go; & as much as the inspirational calendars want you to believe...making something **'beautiful'** happen is not always possible.

In those circumstances, discouragement is the rule not the exception & that's where we find Jeremiah...struggling w/ God between discouragement & frustration...fear & disappointment. Yet he is able to say...

"But the Lord stands beside me like a great warrior.

Before him my persecutors will stumble. They cannot defeat me.

They will fail & be thoroughly humiliated. Their dishonour will never be forgotten."

Even when we are battling things on all fronts, feel ready to give up, see no good decision, there is One who is w/ us, whose grace & faithfulness enable us to move into our day obedient to him...as hard, frustrating, or discouraging as it might be.

Jeremiah & each of us receive exactly what we need to stay fully engaged...even in the struggle. Because...

In every discouragement and struggle, God's grace and call will sustain you.

"The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this." – **1 Thess 5:24**

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

PRAYER OF THE DAY

*Lord God, we know you created all things and all things were good. In our sin and the brokenness we have made the good a burden & a struggle. We struggle to live out healthy relationships, struggle to make godly use of our finances, & worst of all, we struggle to hear & obey your word to us. Help us, as your word engages our hearts now to listen & then do what you call us to do. By your Spirit, draw us deeper into your love & form us more closely into the image of your Son Jesus Christ...
Amen*

Let's hear God's Word

FAITH CHAT:

1. What currently in your life is leading you to feel discouraged?

WORK – HEALTH – FAMILY – CHURCH – GOD – CIRCUMSTANCE IN THE WIDER WORLD

2. When have you ever felt like you were "between a rock & a hard place"?

12 Pentecost '24 B – FULLY ENGAGED: IN THE STRUGGLE

I'm **sure** President Ronald Reagan *WASN'T* the first to say it, but he's the first I remember: "When you're up to your armpits in alligators, it's tough to remember your real job is to drain the swamp." We've all been there...a task or responsibility was ours & ours alone...& somehow/where it got bigger, harder, more complex & all-consuming & there was no way out or around it...plowing ahead was all you could do. You thought you had one job, but that one job became the equivalent of **boxing** an octopus. You got hit from every angle...no win & no way to make it go well.

At this stage in his prophetic ministry...that's Jeremiah. In fact, this scene begins w/ open conflict b/t Jeremiah & Pashur, the 21C priest of the Jerusalem temple. Jeremiah had left the potter's workshop carrying a clay pot. He went to the town rubbish tip & smashed the clay pot & said: "**This** is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: 'As this jar lies shattered, so I will shatter the people of Judah & Jerusalem beyond all hope of repair...' ...Then Jeremiah returned from the garbage dump where he had delivered this message, & stopped in front of the Temple of the Lord. He said to the people there, "This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says: 'I will bring disaster upon this city & its surrounding towns as I promised, because you have stubbornly refused to listen to me.'" – Jer 19:11 & 14-15 Just in case you didn't catch the broken-pot message...Jeremiah stood up in the throngs of temple-goers & told everyone ^{w/in} earshot since they wouldn't repent, the Lord would destroy them.

This very public rebuke did not go unnoticed: **Now** Pashhur son of Immer, the priest in charge of the Temple of the Lord, heard what Jeremiah was prophesying. So he arrested Jeremiah the prophet & had him whipped & put in stocks at the Benjamin Gate of the Lord's Temple. – Jer 20:1-2 Pashur & the rest of the Temple hierarchy had a vested interest in maintaining the prevailing narrative that God would never allow his Temple or his city to be destroyed. As bad as things seemed; they would be safe/fine. There was nothing to fear & nothing to fix...But that sort of Pollyanna hopefulness is no hope & no help at all. **Not** telling people the truth simply permits folks to die in their lies. And by no stretch of the imagination does "love" allow lies to set the course for someone's life...Pleasant, popular, spiritual snake oil of the sort Pashur spoke, led him & countless others to their deaths in battle in Jerusalem & in slavery in Babylon. Comfortable convenient lies are still lies & to live a lie that pits you against God & his word is death.

NB: Jeremiah woke up every day w/ 1 thing echoing in his heart: "**Before** I formed you in your mother's womb I knew you. Before you were born I set you apart & appointed you as my prophet to the nations." Beyond his comprehension/control God had a purpose a vision a call for Jeremiah's life: **I** have put my words in your mouth! Today I appoint you to stand up against nations & kingdoms. Some you must uproot & tear down, destroy &

overthrow. Others you must build up & plant." But doing the right thing does not guarantee an easy life. So Pashur arrested Jeremiah the prophet & had him whipped & put in stocks at the Benjamin Gate of the Lord's Temple. What's Jeremiah thinking over that long night standing chained & bleeding outside the Temple while people pass by laughing at him? It's fair to say a few probably got up in his face & said, "'bout time somebody shut you up." In precise obedience to God, Jeremiah was in turns ignored, mocked, insulted, attacked, beaten, imprisoned...**Doing** the right thing does not guarantee an easy life. Obedience to God's call is no walk in the park.

So Jeremiah complains to the One who got him into this mess. **O** Lord, you misled me, & I allowed myself to be misled. You are stronger than I am, & you overpowered me. Now I am mocked every day; everyone laughs at me. God, "What have you got me into? You didn't tell me this was part of the bargain!" Jonah got more respect & results in Nineveh. Elijah had a better outcome 500 years ago. Jeremiah's got whip wounds & is the butt of every joke Jerusalem's leaders tell. Jeremiah finds himself helpless ^{b/4} the Lord's overwhelming & irresistible power & not one of Jeremiah's calls to repentance actually led to repentance. Instead, he got assaulted. His faithfulness was answered by the wrath of the religious establishment. His diligent obedience brought shame, enmity, & intense hurt in the pit of his soul.

But if I say I'll never mention the Lord or speak in his name, his word burns in my heart like a fire. It's like a fire in my bones! I am worn out trying to hold it in! I can't do it! Speaking Yahweh's word brings him pain; keeping silent hurts worse. Jeremiah knew he was damned by the people if he spoke & damned by God if he didn't. Most of us will do a thankless task if the task bears fruit. **AND** most of us will do a job that doesn't produce notable results if our efforts are appreciated. But who is willing to do that which is both thankless **AND** fruitless?

Yet in crying out to God Jeremiah learns something we should take to heart: **God's** call never blows "retreat"...God's call does not have a quit function, eject button, or reverse gear. God is not going back on his plan purpose & promise to gather for himself a people who "**bring** my salvation to the ends of the earth." – Acts 13:47 Jeremiah can't get away from his call & neither can we. Jesus' command was unconditional & unlimited: "**...you** will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, & to the ends of the earth. – Acts 1:8 **NB:** No escape or retirement clause there.

In prepping to go up to Sydney next week I was reading a book on making disciples. Of course the author talks about the Great Commission, Mt 28:18-20, the verse many of us have redacted from our Bible readings because we don't think it applies to us. The author made a point I often overlook...it's what the Spirit has Mt record ^{b/4} the

famous bit: **So** the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted! – Mt 28:16-17 See it? “but some of them doubted.” **What** did they doubt? Well...the only other time this particular word for “doubt” is used in the NT is when Peter climbs out of the boat & walks toward Jesus on the water **“But** when he saw the wind & the waves, he was terrified & began to sink. “Save me, Lord!” he shouted. Jesus immediately reached out & grabbed him. “You have so little faith,” Jesus said. “Why did you doubt?” – Mt 14:30-31 Again the doubt is not Jesus-directed but internal...insecurity, discomfort, anxiety, fear, lack of confidence or experience...No one in this room would say “I doubt Jesus.” What we would say is, “I doubt I can be used by Jesus.” But we know Jesus doesn’t send the “doubters” back down the mountain until they can muster strength greater than their doubts...worshippers **AND** doubters **ALL. HEAR. THE CALL.**

They also hear the promise: **“And** be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Which is precisely the promise Jeremiah declares over his own heartache for his people & the rock/hard place he lives: **But** the Lord stands beside me like a great warrior. Before him my persecutors will stumble. They cannot defeat me. They will fail & be thoroughly humiliated. Their dishonour will never be forgotten. The struggle ^{w/} God to be faithful to God’s call when it seems no one is listening & everyone’s against you can only be met in the strength of his promise, presence, protection & provision. **You** will stand against the whole land — the kings, officials, priests, & people of Judah. They will fight you, but they will fail. For I am with you, & I will take care of you. I, the LORD, have spoken!” – Jer 1:18b-19

Even when we are battling on all fronts, feel ready to give up, see no good decision, there is One who is ^{w/} us, whose grace & faithfulness enable us to move into our day obedient to him ...as hard, frustrating, or discouraging as it may be.

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“The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.” – 1 Thess 5:24

TAKE IT HOME:

How does Jeremiah’s example, of saying what God had given him to say despite mockery, threats, or attacks, encourage you to offer the hope of Christ to others, keep at it, and not give up?

LET’S PRAY...

Gracious Father, as your word, by your Spirit, takes root in our lives, let us be soil that produces 100-fold harvest. Defend us from distraction, distortion or disobedience. Protect us from shyness, fear, or busyness that prevents us sharing the love we have received from you. Hold us true to your call & show us the people & the places where your word to us is also a word for someone we know & make us generous in word & deed for the salvation of those living distant from you. Let our worship & attentiveness today spill over into every step we take in the week ahead... We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.