

SERMON FOR MARCH 17, 2019
TEXT: JEREMIAH 26:8-15
THEME: KILLING THE MESSENGER

And when Jeremiah had finished speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people, then the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him, saying, "You shall die! ⁹ Why have you prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, "This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant?" And all the people gathered around Jeremiah in the house of the Lord. ¹⁰ When the officials of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the Lord and took their seat in the entry of the New Gate of the house of the Lord. ¹¹ Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and to all the people, "This man deserves the sentence of death, because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears." ¹² Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and all the people, saying, "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard. ¹³ Now therefore mend your ways and your deeds, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will relent of the disaster that he has pronounced against you. ¹⁴ But as for me, behold, I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you. ¹⁵ Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the Lord sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears."

In the name of Jesus:

What would you do if someone gave you one million dollars and then told you to come back as often as you liked and you could have whatever money you needed whenever you wanted? Just ask and it is yours. What if he told you to tell all your friends and they could also come and have a million dollars? Do you think you would tell your friends? Do you think you would show up regularly to receive more from this very wealthy and very generous person?

What would you think if you told your friends and they had you arrested? What would you think if people said you were crazy for

getting money from this generous person? What if people killed you for telling them about this person who was giving away free money? Would you expect people to accuse you of being narrow minded when you told people that they couldn't get free money from any other person? Would you expect people to say things like, "You know if we get our money every week, we won't really appreciate it?" Would you expect people to hunt down this very wealthy, very generous person and kill him?

Welcome to the world of the prophet. If you were to take my recent examples and replace the money with forgiveness, you would exactly describe the insanity that faces the prophet, the apostle, and all the messengers of God. God wants to cover us in His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation and for some reason that makes people angry.

In the Old Testament lesson from today, Jeremiah the prophet is given the task of proclaiming God's Word to His people. The message that Jeremiah has been delivering up to this point in time hasn't been well received. God's chosen people have rejected listening to God's messengers and have rejected following God. God wanted to bless His people, after all, He created and sustained His people throughout their history. But God's people had other ideas. They thought they knew more than God, so they rejected God and His Word.

The priest, Pashur, previously had beaten up Jeremiah because he disagreed with what Jeremiah was saying. God told Jeremiah to proclaim to the people that they needed to change their ways, they needed to repent, to turn to God, or else they and their home city Jeresaelm and their nation of Judah would be destroyed. Passhur disagreed. Jeremiah said destruction was imminent. Passhur said that God would never destroy His people. Who spoke for God?

Passhur became so irritated by Jeremiah that he had Jeremiah beaten up and he placed Jeremiah in the stockade, so to prove to be an example to everyone. If you preach something that the priest Passhur would find offensive, off to the stockade you go!

Finally Jeremiah is released, and when he is, Jeremiah lets the priest have it. He says: "Your name shall be terror on every side! For thus says the LORD: Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends." That is certainly no way to win friends and influence people. But Jeremiah goes on, he tells Passhur that he will die by the sword, that the nation of Babylon will invade and conquer Judah, carrying everyone off into exile. After Jeremiah says this, now everyone was ready to kill him.

Have you ever heard of the term don't kill the messenger? Maybe you have heard it said: "Don't shoot the messenger". We use it to describe the act of blaming a person for delivering bad news to people. Historically this phrase was used before the age of telecommunication. It was used to refer to human envoys who were used to communicate messages from one person to another, or in times of war, from one camp to another. If the message was not deemed acceptable, the receiver of the message would blame the messenger and take their anger out on the person who would be delivering the bad news. Hence the phrase, Don't shoot the messenger.

Today we use the term when people deliver bad news to someone, and in anger, the receiver of the news takes out their anger or frustration on the one who gives the bad news. It can take place when a manager must tell an employee that their position is being eliminated. The decision has been made by people higher up in management, but the one delivering the news gets the brunt of the anger. It happens when a company issues a recall of a product that is defective. While this might be appropriate, consumers may then react negatively to the company by not purchasing other products made by the same brand. Parents many times take the heat for telling their high school senior that

they are moving in the middle of the school year. It may be unavoidable, but the parent takes the heat.

Talk about trying to kill the messenger! Jeremiah was left beaten, battered, bruised, and put in the stocks. And once he was released, many more tried to kill him. But why was Jeremiah saying these things? He was saying these things because God wanted him to say these things. And do you know what? What Jeremiah foretold is exactly what happened! Jeremiah's words proved to be true, for he was a true prophet of the Lord. Jeremiah spoke sternly to the people because he knew that God loved them and did not want to send them to hell for rejecting God and His Word. That is why called the people to repent, to turn from their idol worship and trust in God alone. For Jeremiah said: "Mend your ways and your deeds and obey the voice of the LORD your God... or else! As for me, I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you." Jeremiah called to the people to turn to God and live. Repent, believe in God's love for you, for He wills to save and heal. God is faithful. His love is an everlasting love. He has promised to send a Savior. And He will. Grace, mercy, peace and love come flow from God's mercy seat. So trust in God for now and forever.

Did they get the message? Some did, many didn't. Some 600 years later Jesus came onto the scene. He was God's one and only Son, His faithful Messenger. He came calling people to turn from their sins and to trust in God for forgiveness and salvation. But what did they do and how did they respond? Instead of listening to Jesus, the religious leaders made it their mission to kill Jesus. They were blinded in their rage and unbelief. And so they rejected Jesus and His message. Just as they had done previously, Jerusalem had once again rejected God's prophet. And so Jesus said: "I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem." ³⁴ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵ Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'

Jesus was indeed God's Messenger, and His message was one of love. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have life everlasting. He was the very Stone rejected by the builders, handed over to be tried,

convicted of crimes He did not commit, crucified on Calvary's cross, and laid buried in a tomb. Why? So that by His life, death and resurrection, your sins would be forgiven and you would be called a child of God.

The Bible says that God can not lie. If you confess your sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive you your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. The blood of Jesus cleanses you from all sins. Those times you resist God and His love, those times you refuse to believe in His promises, the times you reject His forgiveness. Jesus comes to you today and desires to gather you under the wings of His grace. You have been baptized in His name, gathered into this community of believers, to be forgiven, fed, and nourished by His Word and Sacraments. Jesus has come to save us from our sins, and even to save us from ourselves. So turn to Jesus, hear His message, trust in Him for now is the acceptable time of salvation.

Amen