

I.N.I.

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
August 27, 2017
Jeremiah 6:10-16

In Christ Jesus, who is the rest for the weary and the guiltless sacrifice for the guilty, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This morning we are beginning a four week journey through the book of the prophet Jeremiah. He prophesied under the last six kings of Judah (626-586 B.C.) During the 40 years of his work, Jeremiah faced a people who were moving away from the Lord and toward judgment. The kings and priests of Judah had led the people into idolatry, immorality, violence, and injustice. As a result of their sinfulness, the people's hearts hardened to Jeremiah's call to repentance. Jeremiah prophesied that their unwillingness to listen to God's Word would lead to their doom. Soon the Babylonians would take them captive and place them in exile.

How did this happen? It is the age old problem of erosion. First the foundation is undermined, then the walls begin to sag, and finally the entire structure comes crashing down. Erosion is like that, not only with structures, but also with human lives.

A habit or a way of life which was once considered immoral and unthinkable is tolerated. And what is tolerated is all too soon excused and condoned. Then it is endorsed and finally openly defended and promoted as being acceptable. And the once moral foundation has been washed away.

Erosion in the life of a Christian is such a subtle thing---subtle yet devastating. It happened in the life of the people of Judah. It is happening in the lives of many Americans and it happens in our lives as well. Our business ethics; our use of our money; our recreation and free time activities; our watching of T.V. programs and movies; our relationship with our spouse and children, family and friends; our response to governmental laws; our use of our tongue; our reaction to immoral behavior that is condoned by society; our respect for and use of the Word of God---all can slowly, silently subtly begin to erode into immoral and ungodly practices. And while we are free to ignore such erosion, and most people do, we are not free to escape erosion's final result or consequence---the total collapse of our moral structure and faith life.

In the past 50 years let's see what has changed in our society and in our lives. Besides the great advancements in technology and science we see the legalized murder of the unborn through all nine months of pregnancy; the legalized gambling in our state and country; the legalized pornography that comes across our cable T.V. channels; the accepted living together arrangements without marriage; the high divorce rate; the acceptance of homosexuality as an alternate but moral lifestyle and legalized homosexual marriage; the widespread disregard for attending God's House to hear His Word; the accepted cursing and swearing language of the average American...and the list could go on and on.

Most all of the things just listed are not only tolerated, but condoned, endorsed, practiced, defended and promoted by many as being acceptable behavior and because we live with it all around us; and because we are born into it, we, sad to say, are no longer shocked by it.

That does not mean that over the years these things are no longer morally wrong in God's eyes; that somehow a transformation has taken place in the moral laws of God so that what used to be wrong is now right, what was immoral is now moral and OK to do. God has not changed. God's Laws have not changed. It is we who have changed. God's Word still stands. Our morals, our standards have eroded.

We have entitled our sermon theme:

WHY SIN IS STILL SIN!

In our first Scripture reading we heard the Lord call Jeremiah to proclaim His Word to Judah. But in our sermon text Jeremiah comes to God with this complaint: **NOBODY IS LISTENING!**

We read vs. 10: **TO WHOM SHALL I SPEAK AND GIVE WARNING, THAT THEY MAY HEAR? INDEED THEIR EAR /S UNCIRCUMCISED, AND THEY CANNOT GIVE HEED. BEHOLD, THE WORD OF THE LORD IS A REPROACH TO THEM; THEY HAVE NO DELIGHT IN IT.**

When Jeremiah thought about the wickedness of his people he complained about the difficulty and hopelessness of his calling. The people had closed, stopped up ears. They had uncircumcised ears---that is ears covered with fat so they could not hear. Their ears were deaf to the Word of God. God's Word was no longer their delight; but a reproach to them. They ridiculed what God had to say to them. For Jeremiah to preach to such people seemed hopeless. He says: **THEREFORE I AM FULL OF THE FURY OF THE LORD. I AM WEARY OF HOLDING IT IN.**

The Lord God replies that He will get His Word out to the youngest and the oldest; to husbands and wives. But it will be the Word of the Law that condemns and convicts. God's indictment of His people is found in vs. 13: **BECAUSE FROM THE LEAST OF THEM EVEN TO THE GREATEST OF THEM, EVERYONE IS GIVEN TO COVETOUSNESS; AND FROM THE PROPHET EVEN TO THE PRIEST, EVERYONE DEALS FALSELY.**

From the rich to the poor; from, the littlest known among them to the most famous; from the young to the old; all seek after material gain and are greedy for more and more.

Did Jeremiah write these words only for Judah or did he write these words in the last few years? No. He wrote them over 2,500 years ago for Judah, but he wrote them also for us. And if we don't think that these words apply to us then we have not taken a good look at ourselves. The materialism in our lives, the desire and want for more has affected us too. Why else do we have stores open 24 hours a day and why do we work so long and so much if it is not to have the things we have and to afford the life-style we have become accustomed to?

The Lord says even the prophets and priests are no exception. They seek the applause, the good will, and gifts of the people. They practice deceit. They deceive the people by proclaiming: **'PEACE, PEACE!' WHEN THERE IS NO PEACE.**

The entire nation had surrendered themselves to greed and covetousness. They had bowed down to the greatest idol of all. This idol has more worshippers than any other religion. Love for this world, the passion for the things that this life has to offer, has rooted itself solidly in every human heart and Judah's spiritual leaders—the prophets and priests had pandered to these unwholesome desires. They ignored the spiritual disease, suppressed the symptoms and continued to preach the “gospel of success, prosperity, and one's own fulfillment.”

'PEACE, PEACE!' WHEN THERE IS NO PEACE. The religious leaders of Jeremiah's day believed that God's patience would never end. So they treated the cancerous growth of sin like a superficial wound or insignificant bruise. But in reality it was a ruinous disease that had infected the entire body. It was a matter of life and death. It was a breakdown of the morality of mankind that threatened their very existence. And all the while they were totally blind to their real condition.

Do we see the same today? The immoral state that we find our nation in today is also because of many religious leaders of our day. Many churches and pastors support the woman's right to an abortion; look upon homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle; look the other way when divorce occurs; do not condemn pre-marital sex or extra-marital affairs as sin; promote disobedience to the government if it suits their needs and are more concerned about a hungry person than a starving, dying soul. Many religious leaders end up preaching moral relativism where anything goes because, after all, God is love.

The Lord asks in vs. 15: **WERE THEY ASHAMED WHEN THEY HAD COMMITTED ABOMINATION?** He answers: **NO! THEY WERE NOT AT ALL ASHAMED; NOR DID THEY KNOW HOW TO BLUSH.**

Do we remember how to blush? Do we tell our children that the way some of the modern rock stars dress today is immoral—that some of the songs they sing is ungodly. That speaking like the world with vulgarity and swearing is a sin against the Second Commandment. That God does want us to dress modestly and not flaunt our bodies in a sexual way before others and that sexual intimacy is to be reserved only for marriage which is what the Sixth Commandment teaches? Society tells them just the opposite.

Do we or our children know that not hearing the Word of God consistently in Church and not worshipping Him with repentant hearts is God-displeasing and a despising of His Word and a sin against the Third Commandment? Society surely won't teach them this!

These words of our God in our text are His warning out of love to the unfaithful people of Judah. It is also His warning out of love to each of us. Will we listen and heed His Word?

You know it is much like driving down the highway and seeing a sign which says. "Dangerous curve ahead! Slow down!" We can heed the warning and slow down, we can ignore the warning and maintain our same speed, or we can oppose the warning and speed up. Whatever response we choose we will not change the truth of that sign. The curve remains dangerous, whether we acknowledge it or not.

Unfortunately most in Judah ignored the warning signs of God's Word or openly opposed it and ended up out of control wiping out on that dangerous curve. They were overrun by the Babylonians.

God's Law applies the same warning to us today. This road leads to sin; this sin leads to death and damnation. Take heed! It may not be an enemy nation that will take over but it will be our greatest enemy Satan that will take over our bodies and souls if we do not listen.

WHY SIN IS STILL SIN!

People have tried to eradicate sin by ignoring it. But it rears its ugly head every day in the thoughts, words and actions of all of us. People have tried to not acknowledge sin, but it still exists. People have tried to change sin by calling it something else, giving in to it and living in it, which is temporarily exciting but eternally fatal.

WHY SIN IS STILL SIN!

People may have lost sight of sin and tried to change it, but God has removed sin. Jeremiah says: **THUS SAYS THE LORD: STAND IN THE WAYS AND SEE, AND ASK FOR THE OLD PATHS, WHERE THE GOOD WAY IS, AND WALK IN IT; THEN YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.** The old paths, the good way is the path and the way that Adam, Enoch and Noah walked; that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob traveled; that Joshua, Samuel and David followed; the way of peace and righteousness through the Messiah—the only Savior of all of mankind. That is the old path and the good way revealed for us in God's Word.

The Lord invited His people to make that choice. They were standing at a crossroads of their national existence. The good, ancient path stretched out before them. The path their believing patriarchs and forefathers had taken. He invited them to repent, to listen, to find true peace, spiritual healing and forgiveness by believing the Gospel message of salvation. Unfortunately, they chose to go a different way, their own way and they were carried away and dispersed throughout Babylon.

As believers in Christ, the same choice lies before us as we continue to build our faith's foundation. Believe and trust in God's promises of forgiveness in Christ; in perfect rest and peace alone in our Savior's life, death and resurrection. Jesus declares: **I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE. NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER EXCEPT THROUGH ME and COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO ARE WEARY AND BURDENED, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST. TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU AND LEARN FROM ME, FOR I AM GENTLE AND LOWLY IN HEART, AND YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.**

Ours is a day in which many have lost sight of the seriousness of sin. Instead sin today is called "a character defect" ... "an error in judgment" ... "a slip of the tongue" ... "a moment of weakness" ... "a disease". But God's Word plays no such word games. Any breaking of God's Commandments, of His unchangeable Law is sin and the paycheck for falling short of God's glory is death and eternal damnation.

We know that sin is still sin, no one can change that, but we also know what happened to sin--- Jesus lived a holy life to be the perfect sacrifice in order to die and pay for sin's punishment and therefore remove it forever. Our sins are cast into the depth of the sea and are remembered no more. May we, filled with the power of Christ's resurrection seek to keep ourselves free from its slavery. May we also daily watch so that our faith and morals do not erode by tolerating sin in our lives, but instead in humble repentance lay all of our sins at the foot of the cross and led by the Holy Spirit follow the old paths and the good ways by walking in Christ and His Word.

Amen.

To whom shall I speak and give warning, That they may hear? Indeed their ear *is* uncircumcised, And they cannot give heed. Behold, the word of the LORD is a reproach to them; They have no delight in it. 11 Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD. I am weary of holding *it* in. "I will pour it out on the children outside, And on the assembly of young men together; For even the husband shall be taken with the wife, The aged with *him who is* full of days. 12 And their houses shall be turned over to others, Fields and wives together; For I will stretch out My hand Against the inhabitants of the land," says the LORD. 13 "Because from the least of them even to the greatest of them, Everyone *is* given to covetousness; And from the prophet even to the priest, Everyone deals falsely. 14 They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, Saying, 'Peace, peace!' When *there is* no peace. 15 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; Nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time I punish them, They shall be cast down," says the LORD. 16 Thus says the LORD: "Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way *is*, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk *in it*.'