

“HOSTILE? INDIFFERENT? UNWISE!”

2nd Sun. in Lent, C

Sunday, February 28, 2010

Zion Lutheran Church, Beecher, IL

Sermon Text – Jeremiah 26:8-15 & Luke 13:31-35

Old Testament Reading – Jeremiah 26:8-15

Epistle Reading – Philippians 3:17-4:1

Gospel Reading – Luke 13:31-35

In the name of Jesus. [Amen.] Our sermon is based on the Old Testament and Gospel readings just read.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

It wasn't the first time... not by a long shot! The Pharisees approached Jesus and tried to scare Him – so that He wouldn't enter Jerusalem.

They told Him that the story “on the street” was that Herod wanted to kill Him, and, for Jesus' own good... He'd better stay away!

Well, as we said, it wasn't the first time that a prophet of God had had his life threatened because He'd brought God's Word to His people. In the verses just before today's Old Testament reading, God sent Jeremiah to the people of Judah. Speaking for God, he told them: **“Thus says the Lord: If you will not listen to me, to walk in my law that I have set before you, ⁵and to listen to the words of my servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently, though you have not listened, ⁶then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth.”** (Jer. 26:4-6, ESV)

In other words, Jeremiah told them that God called them to repent, or God would render His just wrath and punishment upon them. But the message that Jeremiah *also* brought to them was that if **“they [would] listen, and every one turn from his evil way, [then God would] relent of the disaster that [He] intended to do to them because of their evil deeds.”** (Jer. 26:3, ESV)

So, it was a tough message of Law: “Repent... or receive God's wrath!”

But it was also a gracious message of Gospel: “Repent of your evil ways... and receive forgiveness and a new relationship, a new status, with the God who created you and still loves you!”

Even though **“the priests and prophets and all the people laid hold of [Jeremiah and said] ‘You shall die!’”** (Jer. 26:8, ESV) that didn't happen. Jeremiah lived. He wasn't put to death.

As a prophet, Jeremiah was ready to die – if it came to that! And Scripture is chock full of accounts of so many prophets who were killed by those to whom God had sent them.

Those faithful prophets, like Jeremiah, willingly put their lives into jeopardy... *not* because they had a death wish... but because they knew that the message that they carried from God... was bigger... it was more important... than was their life on earth!

This message that they carried to the people would have brought those people joy, peace, and eternal life, but, ironically, the people rejected that message of love and peace... and put to death... the message bearers! In other words, by putting to death the message bearers, the people sealed their own destiny – to die eternally in hell!

Tragically, for so many people over the years, their outright hostility to God's Word – going so far as to even kill those whom God raised up to bring His offer of peace and restoration – is a testament to sinful man's desire to be his own god and have nothing to do with the gracious Lord of All.

How is it in our day? Could it be that Jesus' lament over Jerusalem really doesn't apply to us in our day and age? Oh, you better believe it! There remains to this day so many who are hostile to the Word of God.

So far, in our nation, that hostility very seldom manifests itself into the outright death of those whom God raises up to proclaim His message. Rather, the hostility is usually limited to jokes and innuendo designed to make Christians look to be intolerant, or evil, and often – just plain ignorant.

How will that persecution be in our nation in another 5... 10... or 20 years? Only God knows *that* answer. But according to research that I did, it's estimated that *over 100 million Christians* around the world are persecuted because of their faith in Christ... and many of them... are persecuted unto their death!

Sometimes that hostility shows itself in another way. Although no murder or even physical torture is done; yet, the message that God wants His people to hear is destroyed... *by destroying the credibility of the messenger*. Here's how it sometimes works... and please note, *this is just an example*. God has spared us from this here at this time, but it happens all so often in many Christian communities.

Let's say that within a congregation there's a couple who is living together outside of marriage. The pastor goes to them and seeks to help them see their sin and get right with God and His call for holy living. But the couple tries to deflect their sin and turn the whole situation around by making the pastor to be the "bad guy" and cut his reputation to shreds for his faithfulness.

Although no physical harm is done to the pastor, but through the slander of his name, his ministry could ultimately made to be ineffective in that place – with much damage done to the Gospel *and many other Christians* as well!

Also, there's *another* attitude toward God's Word that's just as bad as that of persecution. Although this attitude seldom leads to physical harm of Christians and those who bear God's Word, it ultimately has the same end for the person caught up in it. This attitude is that of *indifference* to God and His holy Word.

To be indifferent to the message of Law and Gospel... to be apathetic toward God's call of repentance and renewal through faith in Christ... is to ultimately put oneself in the same, exact position as those who Jesus looked upon in today's Gospel reading when He said: **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 would not! (Luke 13:34, ESV)

There are so many who are indifferent to God's command to *faithfully and frequently* gather together to receive His gifts in Word and Sacrament. In love He calls to His children, seeking to gather them and protect them under the "**wings**" (Lk. 13:34, ESV) of His church on earth... but they "**would not**" (Lk. 13:34, ESV) do so!

And either attitude – whether it's hostility or indifference toward the Word of God – **either attitude** is very, very, very unwise!

It's unwise, because God has made it abundantly clear – through prophet after prophet – that He means what He says... and says what He means. He expects those who would be known as His children to walk in holiness and righteousness. He expects His children to repent of their waywardness... *whatever it is* in their lives... and turn anew to Him. In fact, in Jesus' very first sermon, Jesus said: "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**" (Mt. 4:17, ESV)

Many of you listening to this sermon might be reluctant to look at yourself in a mirror later today. That's because you'd expect to see your face to be black and blue, and swollen – having been pummeled by the heavy law in this sermon! But, that's what Lent is about. That's what being a Christian is about. We're to constantly take inventory of our *selves*... our *attitudes*... and our *lives*... and honestly see ourselves for what we are... sinners in dire need of a Savior!

But, I encourage you to go ahead and look in that mirror later... and when you look at yourself... look straight into your eyes. There you'll see one of God's very own children!

Yeah... warts and all... God loves you and forgives you of every sin that you've ever done! For this Jesus, the greatest Prophet of all time, when He entered Jerusalem about 3 months after this incident in Luke 13, was ready to die for those that He... and all the prophets ahead of Him... came to warn. This Jesus, Himself, would be the "**Hen**" who would be lifted up on the cross, and once there... He'd raise up *not* wings... but His arms... and allow His holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death... to be the perfect cleansing agent for every dark misdeed that they'd ever done!

And so it is for you... each one of you! As you look into your own eyes in the mirror later today... tell yourself the truth... marvel at the reality... that you are known by God... *not* as a sinner... but as one of His dear children! That, dear beloved of God, is who you *are*... a Baptized one of His... *forever!* Thanks be to God! [Amen.]

The peace of God that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. [Amen.]