

Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost
September 2 – 3, 2023
All The Help We Need
Jeremiah 15: 15-21

Parenting is fun, isn't it? Especially when your child just doesn't want to listen.

Years ago, before Marcy and I had our boys, we lived next to a family with boys. One day, we heard the mom next door, while she was inside her house, yelling at her boys at the top of her lungs, and we were inside our house! Now, your average individual with no parenting experience might suggest that, "She's crazy!!! Oh, there's no excuse for acting like that!!! What could those little boys have possibly done to illicit that kind of response?"

An experienced parent would know the boys had pushed, and pushed, and pushed, and finally the dam of frustration broke and it was all coming out. They might even get a cheer of support from another mother saying, "You Go Girl, git 'em!"

Marcy just looked at me and said, "OOOOOO, those boys are getting it now! I wonder what they did!"

We both knew they probably deserved it, whatever it was. I grew up with a brother and knew how awful we could be, and Marcy grew up with a brother, likewise. It was no mystery to us.

They didn't listen, they didn't do their chores, they left dirty clothes all over the house, they broke something and didn't confess. They took something, or left something, or forgot something they were told multiple times not to take, leave, or forget! Every parent has their breaking point, and that day was hers.

Now, imagine, if you will, that those boys had an older sibling, maybe an older sister that just happened to be home from college and witnessed this altercation, knowing all too well why the boys were in hot water. And, imagine if you will, that she was having a conversation with mom about their behavior, the inevitability of the consequences, and making sure she did not get swept away with the swift broom of justice, as well. Then, chiming in with mother so the boys could relent and still be redeemed, if possible.

Now you have a pretty good picture of our dear brother Jeremiah as he receives this prophecy from God, speaking on behalf of God, and talking to God all at the same time. Indeed, Jeremiah is speaking for God as to how God is feeling about His children.

Over two centuries earlier, God had judged the 10 Northern Tribes of Israel for their hideous idol worship and following false gods. Assyria exacted that judgement upon them, carrying them off to captivity, never to be seen again.

No problem for the Judeans and Benjamites who were obviously faithful in maintaining the temple sacrifices, which in their mind, was why they were not judged likewise. Today, Jeremiah finds out that was not the case at all. For though they were less obvious in their apostasy, they were guilty none-the-less. For they sinned and oh how they so clearly sinned!

(Chapter 1:16b tells us) They worshipped other gods with idols they handcrafted themselves.

(3:8b) They acted adulterously with gods and worship sites instead of remaining faithful to their groom Yahweh.

(3:25b) They sinned against God from their youth to this day disobeying the voice of God.

(5:18b) They forsook God and served foreign gods and foreigners in the promised land.

(7) They oppressed the sojourner, fatherless, widowed, and shed innocent blood to go after false Gods. They stole, murdered, committed adultery, swore falsely, and even made offerings to Baal. They walked in the counsel of their own wickedness going backwards instead of forwards.

They even sacrificed their sons and daughters as little infants to Molech. Judah and Benjamin were just as bad as the worst the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been and their time was now at hand.

So, Jeremiah stands like the wise older sister pleading with God's people as he pleads with God as well. He can see both sides, not as well as our LORD can, of course, but he pleads likewise anyway. And we can tell from the text that he is communicating how God feels; specifically, God's indignation, God's unrelenting and festering wound from His people which just refuses to be healed!!! The refusal to change the way they thought and the way they acted would be their very undoing.

If parenting is fun, teaching is even more fun!

A day does not go by where our 8th graders here at Faith make me laugh out loud. Likewise, a day does not pass where I'm nearly brought to the very edge of tears. Most of the time the tears are because they are sick or hurting: physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Other times it's because they simply do not care about what we are doing for them.

Wise counsel has instructed me to recognize I can only care as much as they do, but that's hard advice to follow consistently. Sometimes, you just want to be like that mom and scream at the top of your lungs because they did something, forgot something, or just plain didn't care about anything...again. And, you know the judgement of our culture is coming for them, and you wonder if you might get swept right up with them if you're not careful. Then I realize, maybe I deserve to be swept up with them, because I may have just stopped caring for them like a real Christian should.

Looking at this text this week, I realized something. This text is not about how we might be swept up for our sins, it's about someone else entirely.

There was one, alone, who truly experienced the unrelenting festering wound that simply would not and could not heal until His death. There is only one, who never sat in the company of sinful revelers like we all have. One, and only one, bore the reproach of the whole world. One alone, who could digest the Word because it was His words, and He was the Word become flesh. Only one, truly, had the judging hand of our eternal Father on Him, when He cried out from the cross saying, "My God my God, why have you forsaken me?"

And He did that for us, to dwell in us, and save us from ourselves; coming to us where two or more are gathered, hallowing His name!

She's a great sister. I have known her for years - every year she has been alive to be exact. She is the sister of my youngest son's friend. A friend who came through school with my son here at Faith, then at Eustis High, and they still work together on business ventures to this day. This year was the first year I got to have her in class. All the boys said she was really smart, and she did not disappoint.

What I find fascinating about her is not her intelligence, that can't be denied. I find her intuitiveness is on a whole other level that I have not experienced before. Not only does she understand what I am teaching, she understands where her classmates are struggling, when I am not getting a concept across. And, while I am ready to just scream to the heavens in frustration

that they can't get something simple in their heads, she gently raises her hand in class and says, "Let me see if I can be of some help."

You would not believe how that calms me down, lowers the tension in the class, and keeps the lesson moving in the right direction; rather than devolving into chaos, like it frequently can when I'm running the show. Then, she does help, and her struggling classmates are relieved and the punishment that was looming over the class is abated. It's like she can read the room, read me, and knows when it's time to gently suggest a course correction that works for everyone.

If ever there was a man who could read, not only the room, but the church, and even the world, it was Jesus. He understood the Father because He came from Him, and He understood us because He lived as one of us. He sat with sinners, leaders, and mothers alike; understanding them like no one can. He read the hearts and minds of everyone, and we collectively killed Him for all His good deeds for us.

Thank God, His death was for us, not despite us.

But our Lord didn't hang on that cross to suffer for no purpose other than to alleviate the looming judgment we all deserved. Our Lord rose from the dead, as well, to be there by our side...

...to listen to our prayers, even when we don't know how to pray, and to remind us every day, "I'm right here, I always have been here, and I always will be here for you, just let me be of some...but most certainly... all the help you'll need."

AMEN

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