

Sunday October 16th 2022

A service of worship for use at home

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Charity number 1134226

Theme: Learning from Jeremiah

Call to Worship: Psalm 19:1-4a

How clearly the sky reveals God's glory!
How plainly it shows what He has done!
Each day announces it to the following day;
Each night repeats it to the next.
No speech or words are used, no sound is heard,
Yet their message goes out to all the world
It is heard to the ends of the earth.

Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving

Loving Lord, you draw light out of darkness and coax beauty from chaos.
You spread a rainbow promise across time and space:

AMEN

You make music and song in the sounds of creation.
You paint pictures of glory in the stars and the clouds:

AMEN

You scatter sparks of creative energy.
You penetrate madness with wisdom and truth:

AMEN

You weave patterns of hope in the traumas of history.
You lavish your love gifts in boundless excess:

AMEN

You grace us with peace and warm hospitality,
You welcome each person regardless of race:

AMEN

You invite us to dine at the table of plenty.
You fill us with hope, with faith and with joy:

AMEN

You come to us, embrace us, believe in us and stay with us.
For you are our God, Redeemer and Friend.

AMEN

Hymn: Light of the World

Light of the world,
You stepped down into darkness,
Opened my eyes, let me see
Beauty that made this heart adore you,
Hope of a life spent with you.

King of all days,
Oh so highly exalted,
Glorious in heaven above;
Humbly you came to the earth you created,
All for love's sake became poor.

*So here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am so say that you're my God;
And you're altogether lovely,
Altogether worthy,
Altogether wonderful to me.*

And I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross (repeat)
Chorus

Readings:

Matthew 16: 21-25

From that time on Jesus began to say plainly to His disciples "I must go to Jerusalem and suffer much from the elders, chief priests and the teachers of the law. I will be put to death, but three days later I will be raised to life"

Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke him. "God forbid it Lord! That must never happen to you!"

Jesus turned around and said to Peter "Get away from me Satan! You are an obstacle in my way, because these thoughts don't come from God but from Human nature."

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget self, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his own life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Jeremiah 1: 4-10

The Lord said to me, "I chose you before I gave you life and before you were born, I selected you to be a prophet to the nations."

I answered, "Sovereign Lord, I don't know how to speak; I am too young."

But the Lord said, "Do not say that you are too young, but go to the people I send you to, and tell them everything I command you to say. Do not be afraid of them, for I will be with you to protect you. I, the Lord have spoken!"

Then the Lord stretched out His hand, and touched my lips, and said to me, "Listen, I am giving you the words you must speak. Today I give you authority over nations and over kingdoms, to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

Sermon Part One: The story of Jeremiah's life with all its ups and downs

Intro: The first church I went to when I was about 13, was a Methodist Church. In the Sunday school room there was a large picture which had the text under it 'Jehoiakim burneth the Scroll!' This was taken from the turbulent life and times of the Prophet Jeremiah. King Jehoiakim of Judah had lost patience with Jeremiah who was always prophesying that, if the Israelites didn't do as God asked them to do then they would be destroyed by Babylon. Jeremiah had written down all his prophesy's and his trusty scribe, Baruch took it to the king and read it to him. The king's response was to chop off each sentence as it was read and burn it!

What does the name Jeremiah mean to you? Most people think of Jeremiah as a misery and a bit of a winger - a bit like Jonah - the type of person you really don't want to have at your party!

The Message

But I have a soft spot for Jeremiah. He had a really rough deal but he survived. The reading we had comes right from the beginning of his ministry when he was obviously a very young man. God called him to be a prophet - and he really didn't want to do it - so he made excuses 'Lord I am much too young. I don't know the words to say.' But God was having none of it. Jeremiah was His man and God gave him a simple but quite explosive message to give to the people of Judah.

The first bit of the message took up most of his life 'God was about to uproot and pull down to destroy and to overthrow' but the end of the message said 'to build and to plant'. So it was mainly a message of destruction. Jeremiah had to tell the people of Judah that, if they continued to worship foreign gods and to forget their covenant with the God of Israel then He would withdraw His protection and Judah and Jerusalem would be completely destroyed. After many years of near disaster, the worst thing possible happened - the armies of Babylon marched in and destroyed everything and took all the leading people into exile. It was only when the armies of Babylon were at the very gates of Jerusalem that Jeremiah changed to the second bit of the message given to him right at the

beginning, that God would 'build and plant'. After 60 years in exile in Babylon God would forgive the people and restore them to Jerusalem and Judah.

The life of Jeremiah

In the meantime, Jeremiah's life was hard. As you can imagine, the people hated Jeremiah's preaching about judgement and destruction. On the whole they refused to listen to him, believing that God would always protect them no matter what they did. During his life, Jeremiah was beaten, thrown into prison, his life was threatened and near the end he was thrown into a huge water cistern and left in there to die. He was rescued, but not before he feared for his life.

Not surprisingly, Jeremiah complained bitterly to God. He cursed the day on which he was born, he wished he was dead, he said that he tried not to preach God's words but they were like a burning fire inside him and he could not keep them in; and then the people turned on him again.

There was one brief time when things seemed to be going his way. There was a new young king Josiah who 'did what was good in the sight of the Lord' - most kings 'did what was evil in the sight of the Lord' but the young Josiah was a good king and with the help of Jeremiah, began to reform the religious life of Judah. First of all he did a complete repair and refurbishment of the Temple, finding of the scroll of Deuteronomy which had been hidden in the Temple, which was read it to the people - but it didn't last as Josiah got himself killed in battle and everything went back to the way it had been - no wonder Jeremiah complained!!

Then we move on to Jehoiakim burning the scroll. God told Jeremiah to have one last try to get people to change, He was to write down everything that he had preached and Baruch the scribe first read it in the Temple. Then he was taken to King Jehoiakim who cut it up one bit at a time and burnt it. That really was their final warning. Everything went downhill from then on. Judah was captured, Jerusalem and the Temple were completely destroyed and thousands of people were marched off to Babylon as slaves.

Only then did Jeremiah tell the people in a letter to build houses, plant gardens, allow their children to marry and have children because after 60 years they would return and rebuild.

Stop for a moment and sing again before we consider what we can learn from the story of Jeremiah and Judah.

Hymn: Lead us Heavenly Father lead us

Lead us Heavenly Father lead us,
O'er the world's tempestuous sea;
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
For we have no help but thee;
Yet possessing every blessing
If our God our Father be.

Saviour breath forgiveness o'er us;
All our weakness thou dost know,
Thou didst tread this earth before us,
Thou didst feel its keenest woe;
Tempted, taunted, yet undaunted,
Through the desert thou didst go.

Spirit of our God descending,
Fill our hearts with heavenly joy.
Love with every passion blending,
Pleasure that can never cloy;
Thus provided, pardoned, guided,
Nothing can our peace destroy.

Sermon Part Two: What can we learn from his relationship with God?

What then can we learn from the story of Jeremiah - one of God's faithful followers?

1. If we follow the path that God points out for us, there is no guarantee that it will all be a bed of roses! Remember what Jesus said in the first reading; we had 'take up your cross every day and follow me'. We know from the life of famous Christians that they often suffered greatly. There was a programme recently about Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Just days before the end of the war he was killed. Josiah was killed. It seems that God sees a bigger picture, and He knows that for us death is not the end but a new beginning.
2. However, can we always guarantee that God will give us what we need? Jeremiah had his faithful friend and secretary Baruch. God gave Jeremiah the words to say. God never deserted him; always guided, led and inspired him and He never stopped speaking to and through him.
3. This, for me is the really important thing; He allowed Jeremiah to complain and let out all his frustration and anger. And that goes for us as well. If we are following God's path and we are angry and frustrated because everything keeps going wrong, God is quite prepared for us to let rip at Him - just as long as we keep talking to Him. He expects us to be honest about the way we feel, even if our hearts are breaking, even if God's heart is breaking. Read some of the Psalm and you will see what I mean.
4. And finally we learn that, at the end there is always the message of hope. At the end of the Bible is the book of Revelation and at the end of Revelation God points us to the new heaven and the new earth when all will be as God intends it should be.

I have been to three Christian funerals, and amid the tears there was much laughter and joy; The Christian message - just like Jeremiah's message - is one of hope.

If you have the time, reading the book of Jeremiah will teach us much about the life of a faithful follower of God.

Hymn: Lord I come to you

Lord, I come to you, let my heart be changed, renewed,
Flowing from the grace that I've found in you.
And Lord I've come to know, the weaknesses I see in me
Will be stripped away by the power of your love.

*Hold me close, let your love surround me.
Bring me near; draw me to your side.
And as I wait I'll rise up like the eagle,
And I will soar with you, your Spirit leads me on
In the power of your love.*

Lord, unveil my eyes, let me see you face to face,
The knowledge of your love as you live in me.
Lord, renew my mind as your will unfolds in my life,
In living every day by the power of your love.

Chorus,

Prayers: Confession

Lord of Light You fill us, your children with your light,

So often your light in us is dimmed by our selfishness and greed.

There are times when we ignore those in need.

We sometimes look at other people and feel we are better than them so we turn away.

We criticise other people who are doing the best they can.

We can make others feel inferior.

We are unprepared to speak out against injustice.

We are unprepared to stand up for Christ or witness to His love.

And so, the light is dimmed. Forgive us Lord and enable your light to shine through us so that others will see you in us and turn to you and find the answer to all their deepest needs.

We thank you Father that you have promised that when we come to you in repentance you are always prepared to forgive - so forgive us Lord and help us to change. Amen

Intercessions

Lord of peace; bring peace where there is violence. We bring to you Lord, the people of Yemen, of Afghanistan and we bring to you the people of Ukraine. And we remember soldiers on both sides of the conflict.

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of Justice; bring justice where people live in fear, for those places where governments and soldiers impose their will. At this time we pray particularly for the peoples of the Holy land, both Palestinians and Israelis. May all the communities of that land find ways to live together with justice and peace. We pray for our brothers and sisters living with persecution

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of the poor and the marginalised; where there is poverty and unfairness, where people are hungry, homeless or suffering for the want of simple medicine, move in the hearts of those who have plenty so that there is a fair sharing of the earth's resources. We pray for all refugees living in terrible conditions in camps - suffering from hunger, disease and a lack of hope. May they receive mercy, compassion and practical help.

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of creation; forgive us for misusing your created world and making deserts where there had been abundance, for polluting clean air and water. We pray for the governments of the world who have met in Glasgow to discuss climate change and those meeting at the COP 27 conference. Give courage to those who work to save the environment. We pray for those who are suffering because of climate change - the peoples of Sub Saharan Africa who are suffering the worst drought in living memory, those suffering because of violent floods or wild fires.

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of healing and wholeness; we bring to you those who are known to us personally who need your healing power.....

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of the Kingdom of God, who came into this world, not to condemn it but to save, work with your people, give us courage, wisdom and power as we bring the message of your love and forgiveness to a needy world. Send your Holy Spirit and may your Kingdom Come.

In the Darkness

Let your light shine. Amen

Hymn: Father hear the prayer we offer

Father, hear the prayer we offer:
Not for ease that prayer shall be,
But for strength, that we may ever
Live our lives courageously.

Not for ever in green pastures
Do we ask our way to be:
But by steep and rugged pathways
Would we ask to climb to thee.

Not forever by still waters
But would smite the living fountains
From the rocks along our way.
Would we idly quiet stay;

Be our strength in hours of weakness,
In our wanderings be our guide;
Through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be thou at our side.

Let our path be bright or dreary,
Storm or sunshine be our share;
May our souls, in hope unwearied,
Make thy work our ceaseless prayer.

Blessing

May our Lord, guide us in our plans and visions and sustain us as we seek to do His will;
May the blessing and peace of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit go with us this day and into eternity, Amen