

The Third Sunday after Pentecost—Proper 7—Year A
Jeremiah 20:7-13
Psalm 69: 8-11, (12-17), 18-20
Romans 6:1b-11
Matthew 10:24-39

If we are looking for a *comfortable faith*, we're *not going to find it today*. **Jeremiah** makes clear the **costs of speaking what God has given you to speak** and how **lonely** it can be.

Jeremiah might rather be *anywhere* else than *where he is*, doing *anything* else rather than *what he is doing*, **but he cannot do otherwise**.

From *his* perspective, he has been **enticed by God, overpowered by God**, and **Jeremiah** has cried **“uncle.”** Things are a **mess** all around him. *Everyone else* wants to **pretend that it's all good; everything is just fine**. But ol' **Jeremiah** has to **shout, “Violence and destruction!”** This *does not make you popular* with people. **He has become a laughingstock; everyone mocks him**.

Psalm 69 also echoes this cost. The **psalmist** talks about how he has **suffered reproach for God's sake** and **how shame has covered his face**. He talks about how **his family doesn't recognize him**, and how **he's an alien to his siblings**. He talks about how **people are talking against him behind his back**, and how **even the drunkards make up songs about him**. Fun times.

And the **gospel doubles down** on how *not-fun* this all can be. **Jesus** says, **“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”**

Jesus then makes it really clear that **“bringing things out into the light, joining him in the work of uncovering the things previously covered up, making known the things that were previously held as secrets, and proclaiming from the housetops what could only previously be whispered,”** *doing these things WILL cause division, even division in our most intimate circles*.

Might this be a way to understand what **many of us are experiencing** these days as we **try to speak** of what has **risen to the surface** and **come into the light** in the **convergence of COVID and race?**

It is *not fun* to **live an ordered life, wed to our baptismal vows, bound to**

- **vows that call us to continue in the way of Jesus, to commit to community** *even when, especially when, we disagree*, **vows that call us to keep breaking bread with one another in creative ways**, and to **keep anchoring ourselves in prayer**;
- **vows that call us to persevere against evil and repent of sin and return to Jesus and his way**;
- **vows that call us to proclaim the good news of God in Christ** and the **divine longing that we be reconciled** in a time when we have *never seemed more divided* and the *news has never seemed worse*;
- **vows that call us to seek and serve Christ in all persons loving our neighbor as ourselves**;
- **vows that call us to strive for justice and peace, and respect the dignity of every human being**.

It is *not fun* to live an ordered life, wed to these baptismal vows and all that they demand of us, when *following them* will absolutely put us out-of-step with the world around us, and *maybe out-of-step with our very own families*.

And the great temptation is to pull back from these demands that Jesus and the cross have laid upon us. The temptation is to retreat to our *comfortable* spaces far out of the fray.

And that's *exactly* the temptation that Jeremiah had to wrestle with. He tries his darnedest to retreat—the ancient Israel version of parking it on his deck in a rocking chair (which I am sympathetic to); kind of a “*world-do-your-thing-I’m-out*” approach.

EXCEPT FOR, IT DOESN'T WORK. Call is call, and if you're given awareness; if you're given a word to speak, *and you don't speak it, it eats you up*. Jeremiah tells us *exactly* how this goes: If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.

These words that we are given to speak—it can be a word in the private spaces of our most intimate circles of family and friends, or it can be a word we are to speak in the public spaces of our work or school or in the public square writ large.

And this *isn't* just about the words we speak; it's bigger than that. This is also about how we acknowledge, claim, and exercise the POWER given to us by God through the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, our weariness *isn't* about *doing the work*; *the weariness comes from all the energy we spend* trying to keep a lid on that Godgiven power; *the weariness comes* when we try so hard to keep our light under a bushel when God wants that light wants to shine.

Jeremiah finally makes the determination that he just can't keep quiet, and *come what may*, he understands that the LORD is with [him] like a dread warrior; [his] persecutors will stumble; they won't prevail against him. Jeremiah finally consents, yields, decides, *he's all in*.

And this is where Romans picks up and tells us *precisely* what that “all in” means: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”

In a nutshell, we die with Christ, and we are raised with Christ to walk in newness of life. Paul argues, “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our *old self* was crucified with him, so that the body of sin, the *body of separation*, might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin, *enslaved to all those things that slice us and dice us and divide us and keep us apart*.” Paul is clear, going “all in” means *dying, means having our old self crucified and claiming the freedom* that comes as you are *raised into a new life, a bigger life, a larger self* with Christ as our head and heart guiding our hands to serve *as he would serve*, guiding our feet to go *where he goes*, guiding our eyes to see *what he sees and not to look away*, guiding our mouth to speak *his word of fierce love and compassion and justice and mercy*, guiding us to act *as he would act*.

It certainly feels like so much is dying these days, AND it *also* feels like something is desperately trying to be born.

Can we understand that it is **sin and separation that is being nailed to the cross, SO THAT we can ALL be set free to walk in newness of life, together, in resurrection power?**

In all that is crumbling, can we trust that **God is doing a new thing** and that **God wants us to join in this holy work?**

Can we be clear-eyed that **this work is going to cost us, and cost us dearly**, but ***can you really put a price on***, in the words of Paul, **“being alive to God in Christ Jesus”?**

Can we finally say the “uncle” that **Jeremiah** did, and **just accept** that we ***EITHER*** join the **Pentecostal fire that is igniting hearts everywhere to build a new creation of many languages, and races, and cultures, and perspectives** ***OR*** we try to contain that energy, put a lid on it, hold it in, shut it down, and feel that burning fire in our bones.

GOD’S LOVE WANTS TO BURN. We ***EITHER*** join it as it sweeps across our world ***OR*** wear ourselves out avoiding it. ***But make no mistake***, avoiding the **INVITATION OF LOVE** drains your life away, ***and not in the transformative way of dying and rising with Christ, but in the you’re-breathing-but-not-living way.***

No, there is a better way. ***Take up the cross, lose your small life, let your old self be crucified, AND THEN rise with Jesus and set about to make the whole world new, and in the process, we’ll find the only life worth living.*** Amen.

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