**Jeremiah 26:1-6** November 6, 2016

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Last Judgment, End Time 2

 *Jeremiah 26:1 Early in the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came from the Lord? 2“This is what the Lord says: Stand in the courtyard of the Lord’s house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the Lord. Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word. 3Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done. 4Say to them, ‘This is what the Lord says: If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, 5and if you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened ), 6then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth.’ ”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**“Judgment” – A Message of Mercy!**

 “God will judge!” Sounds like a hater, doesn’t it?

 I know. I am too old to use a slang word like that. But it is an interesting word. For a lot of reasons, it is a perfect word for the time we live in. But here is the problem with the word “hater.” It is has come to basically mean anybody doesn’t agree with me. Oh sure, some “haters” actually do hate. But very often they are simply people who don’t agree with us. And we call them “haters” because our case is weak or we are too lazy to defend our own ideas, and so we just dismiss their viewpoint by calling them a name. If people don’t like the music I play, I just call them haters, and I feel pretty good about my music—even if it is bad music. If I make a bad move passing someone on a road and they blare away on their horn, I just call them haters – even though I was the one who nearly killed them.

 And so when the people of Israel went to their capital city of Jerusalem, up to the temple to worship, and there in the courtyards of the temple—sort of, *sort of*, the equivalent to our church parking lot—and they came up to the courtyard of the temple and they heard this street preacher named Jeremiah standing out in the courtyard, and all the priests and temple helpers scowling at him, giving him mean looks, and he says, ***“This is what the Lord says: If you do not listen to me and follow my law…then I will make this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth.”*** I think when those Israelite dads went up to the temple to worship God, I think they scowled too, and wished that their young boys didn’t have to hear the words of haters, right there outside God’s house.

 If Jeremiah the prophet lived in 2016, Jeremiah might just be the picture on the side of the Wikipedia page for “hater.” Jeremiah disapproves of the people’s ways. He tells them that they had better change. He tells them that if they don’t change God is going to turn their beloved city into a smoldering crater. Sounds like a hater to me!

**I. A Warning Is Mercy, not Hatefulness**

 And if you should go home or to the store and someone should ask you about today’s message in church and you tell them, “The main point of the worship service was Judgment Day…”, or if we are blessed with first-time visitors this week, and they hear the theme for the week (Judgment Day), and they listen to the pastor preach about God judging people and their eternal punishment in the fires of hell—you know what? People are going to think of me as a mean-spirited pastor and this church as a spiteful bunch of unhappy people in a world that is going against them; hateful.

 You see the problem here, don’t you. Problem is, that a lot of people think of warnings as hatefulness. When the parent suggests to the teenager, who is considering dropping out of high school, that it will be a bad decision for a lot of reasons, their advice is often not welcome. When the police officer warns that driving too fast could have very bad results, their friendly warning is often met with scorn. People who give warnings are often looked at as hateful, meddling people on power-trips. But the truth of the matter is that they are trying to help.

 I would suggest that there is no more merciful, more caring, more concerned message than the warning of judgment.

 But you say, God should just talk nice soft, soothing words. What else can God do? He tells people what his will is. He invites them to come. He promises gifts and every blessing. He speaks to them in his word. He has provided devotion books for those who feel like reading the Bible is too intimidating. He puts Sundays School teachers in our classrooms who speak the word of God to our young ones at a level they understand and enjoy. God invites us in all of these ways and more. And most people choose to dismiss it altogether. And even many of his people choose to only show up in church only when absolutely nothing else in life gets in the way, and probably never have prayers and devotions at home, maybe not even before meals. And when that is how most people choose to honor their Creator and make it nearly impossible to hear God’s message – what is God supposed to do except tell one of his prophets, “Well Jeremiah, I was hoping it wouldn’t come to this, but ***This is what the Lord says: Stand in the courtyard of the Lord’s house and speak to all the people… Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word.”***

**II. God’s Judgment Message Is for Healing**

 And so Jeremiah gets the task of standing out there for everyone to hear, to preach a message almost none of them want to hear. “Judgment is coming.” He knows that he is going to be labelled a hater, and yet God has sent him. God is so serious in sending him that he lays it on Jeremiah, ***“Do not omit a word.”*** It’s like he is saying, “I know that just about no one is going to like what you have to say, Jeremiah, and I know that you are going to be tempted to pull your punches, but I am telling you to say it or else I am going to hold you responsible.” God holds Jeremiah responsible to speak the truth even though they were the people who were not listening and thumbing their noses at God, and inventing whole new ways of sinning against him. To these stubborn people who rejected every bit of authority that God had over their lives, and who deserved their Creator’s judgment, God was sending his prophet out like a sacrificial lamb and was going to hold *him, Jeremiah,* guilty if he didn’t tell them what they all already knew and had heard and had rejected and had threatened him not to repeat. God sent Jeremiah out and said, “You need to say everything I tell you. Do not shave off one word of what I tell you.”

 But it’s not just the way people listen that’s the problem. Another problem is, that sometimes, people who give warnings actually are haters, meddlers and on a power trip. And sometimes that can even happen with Christians who are messengers of God’s judgment. Sometimes it seems like the fire-and-brimstone preacher is having just a little too much fun talking about fires of hell for sinners. Sometimes Christians, when faced with anti-Christian sentiment, seem to find a little too much joy in the knowledge that the unbelievers will “get what’s coming to them.” Sometimes, God’s messengers of his warnings can be a little bit unloving, or at least appear that way.

 God is pleading with his people. He is the wife watching a husband destroy himself with alcohol and pleading and encouraging and praying not just for a week or a month, but through the decades because she loves him, God sends Jeremiah out saying, ***“Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word. Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning.”*** Like that George Bailey (remember him from *It’s A Wonderful Life*?) pleading with Mr. Gower not to do something he will forever regret – like that God sends his prophet out to warn these people even if he is going to get cuffed up side the head. “Tell them.”

 Yes, God’s love for the lost is so great that he sent his Son to die for them. All of us sinners were part of that picture, drowning in an ocean of debt, bills we couldn’t pay, with no way out. And Jesus came in, paid the debt of sin, cleared it up and erased our history of sin in a moment. It didn’t take seven years. That’s how God has worked. That’s not how haters work.

 But if people reject it, he isn’t going to force it on them. God’s love is so great for unbelievers that he is reluctantly willing to let some of his own adopted children, in a smaller way, to suffer a similar fate to that of Christ. That’s not how haters work.

**III. “Judgment” Is Also Our Loving Message**

 Now you might think I’m making mountains out of molehills here, about the tough job Jeremiah had. But listen to this side note from this same chapter of Jeremiah. *“Now Uriah son of Shemaiah… was another man who prophesied in the name of the Lord; he prophesied the same things against this city and this land as Jeremiah did… They took [Uriah] to King Jehoiakim, who had him struck down with a sword and his body thrown into the burial place of the common people”* (26:20,23).

 In the time of that same prophet-killing king, King Jehoiakim, God sent Jeremiah to shout out in the temple courts words of judgment. But here’s something: the temple courts where God sent Jeremiah were about as far away from Jehoiakim’ s palace as this church is from the houses that you could see across the street from here if we had plate glass in our windows instead of these beautiful stained glass windows. You can just imagine the prophet Jeremiah standing here and the prophet-killing king Jehoiakim, right over there on his front porch, can’t you?

 God’s love for the lost is so great that even after sacrificing his first Son for the world’s sins, he still continues to send other adopted children to tell them what the first Son has done. God allows his heart to be wounded through the unjust treatment of his children so that just maybe some of outside might listen and be saved. Is that the way a hateful God acts?

 The judgment message we pronounce, is far clearer than what Jeremiah had. Jeremiah could not yet point Israel to the Savior Jesus Christ. Jeremiah could only point them to a shadow, a promised and future Savior in the future. But we have a clearer message of judgment. That same Jesus who came once to save us, will as we confess in the Nicene Creed, “…come again in glory to judge the living and the dead..” As we heard in our second reading, *“The Lord Jesus [will be] revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord… on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people.” (2 Thess. 1:7-10)*

 We do have to be straightforward with people and tell them that as it stands with people who trust in their own goodness to get to heaven—who say like some have said, “Your service to others is the rent you pay to get to heaven”—to people who say that, God says, “Repent for judgment is near.” We say repent not because we are haters, but because God wants all people to turn away from themselves, away from the arrogance that whitewashes the sins we commit, away from the phoney-balogna idea that the face I see in the mirror every morning is the one responsible for getting me to heaven. We must turn to another Savior from sin. And so you too see how the message of judgment is not one of hate, but the ultimate message of mercy. Unless people hear this message, they cannot turn to their Savior.

 So if you ever find yourself in that position, that time of life where you have to talk about God’s judgment on sin, remember Jeremiah chapter 26. Remember that you speak not out of hatefulness, but out of mercy. Remember that God’s purpose in sending you is not to offend (though that might happen), but to save. Remember that some of the kindest possible words you could ever speak to people are God’s word of “Judgment”, because only when they take that to heart and throw themselves on the mercy of Jesus, only then can they be judged righteous and holy in Jesus’ name. Amen.