2nd Sunday in Lent – Year C – February 24, 3013 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY

Based on Jeremiah 26:8-15 written by Pastor Paul Horn

“Listen to what the LORD has to say.”

*8But as soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the Lord had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, “You must die! 9Why do you prophesy in the Lord’s name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?” And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the house of the Lord.*

*10When the officials of Judah heard about these things, they went up from the royal palace to the house of the Lord and took their places at the entrance of the New Gate of the Lord’s house. 11Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and all the people, “This man should be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against this city. You have heard it with your own ears!”*

*12Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and all the people: “The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard. 13Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the Lord your God. Then the Lord will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you. 14As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. 15Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the Lord has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing.”*

Does this scenario sound familiar? A parent walks into the living room, tells the child sitting on the floor staring at the TV, “After this show I would like you to turn off the TV.” Without even looking up at the parent the child acknowledges, “Uh-huh.” After some time has passed the parent hears the sounds of a new program echoing from the living room. The parent strolls back into the living room and the child is no longer sitting on the floor, but standing at least, remote control in hand, still staring at the television. The parent says, “And what did I say?” The child responds with even looking up, “I know, I was just checking to see what the next show was going to be about.”

We call that “selective hearing.” But our children are not the only guilty ones. We use selective hearing with our spouse, our doctors, our friends, our employer and employees. We hear what we want to hear and tune out what we don’t want to hear. Do you think that this is true in a person’s spiritual life as well? People shop around for a church until they find a pastor who will preach what they want to hear not necessarily what they need to hear.

In our story this morning, the prophet Jeremiah was sent by the LORD to deliver the LORD’s message to the people of Israel. We will see what happens when Jeremiah listens to the LORD, does what he asks him to do, and we’ll see what happens when the people choose not to listen to the words from the LORD’s messenger. I pray that from these words of God today that we would be better listeners of God’s Word no matter how troubling, challenging or painful they might be.

Our story this morning is from the Book of Jeremiah. About a hundred years before Jeremiah was called to be a prophet to Jerusalem, the Lord had punished the Northern Kingdom of Israel for their disobedience, worshiped false gods instead of the LORD as the true God. The Assyrian army carried them away, and they pretty much disappeared from history. The Southern Kingdom of Israel, called Judah, should have been scared straight by that judgment against their northern brothers. They weren’t. Unfortunately, the people of Jerusalem placed their pride in their temple. Not in God, mind you, but in the temple. They figured as long as the temple was there, God would be with them. They were convinced the temple made them untouchable.

But even though they felt that the temple was important, they didn’t really worship God with a true heart. They went through the motions at worship, they heard the words from the priest, but when they went home, they went back to doing what they had been doing, worshiping idols, false gods, which were really no gods at all.

The Lord decided to get their attention. He sent the prophet Jeremiah with this message, **“This is what the LORD says: If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, and 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), then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth”** (Jeremiah 26:4,5).

If you remember, Shiloh was where the Lord had his tabernacle during the period of the Judges. The tabernacle was the tent Moses had built – the Old Testament worship center - a place where people could bring sacrifices and offerings. But when Israel was disobedient, the Lord allowed the Philistines to destroy the tabernacle and capture the Ark of the Covenant – which symbolized the presence of God. Since the presence of LORD was absent, the people no longer came to Shiloh. It became a ghost town. So the warning was: change your ways and repent. If you don’t, judgment is coming.

You would think that when the Lord speaks, people would listen. You would think that when God sends a prophet, people would take note. Oh, the people noticed Jeremiah. He couldn’t be missed. There he was proclaiming God’s judgment in the temple courtyards. But rather than change their ways, the people rallied against God and his prophet. We’re told, **“But as soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the LORD had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets, and all the people seized him and said, ‘You must die! Why do you prophesy in the LORD’s name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?’ And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD”** (Jeremiah 26:8,9). It became apparent the people didn’t want to change their ways. They wanted to shoot the messenger (or in this case hurl rocks at him). When he was dead then they could get back to the life they had been living.

Now I hope that after a sermon has been preached from this pulpit no one has ever thought, “Are there any rocks out back we can throw at this guy?” But could it be that we sometimes confuse the messenger with the message? Whose message it is, after all? I spend many hours preparing a sermon. After I deliver it and sit down I can truthfully and humbly say, “My people heard the Word of God today.” But there are some Sundays, maybe even every Sunday, when the LORD shares words with us we do not want to hear, so we tune it out. Or we change the meaning to fit our personal feelings, without ever exploring God’s Word to see what he really says.

For example: God says, “Marriage is between one man and one woman.” But people don’t listen. Instead they make excuses, “But what if two people of the same sex really love each other? What if they’re good people, good parents? What if they were born that way?” And they never listen to God, the Creator, who says, “Same sex marriage was never my plan, nor did it ever enter my mind that this would be pleasing to me. Those who continue to live this way will be judged by me. My design for marriage still stands.”

There are words from our God that we just don’t want to hear. God says to husbands, “Love your wives. Treat them with respect. Be the spiritual leader in your home and lead your children and your wife to Christ.” (Ephesians 5:25-6:4) But we tune out that word, because either 1) we haven’t been living that way and it makes us feel guilty or 2) if we decide to repent and change our behavior and actually follow God’s will for us as husbands that would mean a lot of work. What other words from God don’t you listen to? God says, “Stop talking about other people behind their back. If you have an issue, go and talk to them about it, and do so in love.” (Ephesians 4:29-32; Matthew 18:15-18) But we tune out that word, too, because either 1) we’re too full of pride to go and talk to someone, or 2) that takes too much work, or 3) it’ll be uncomfortable, or 4) we’re not ready to forgive just yet. And like a child who is told to turn off the TV we don’t listen.

Or could it be that at times we, too, like the Israel of old, are guilty of not even wanting to listen to the LORD’s word? How many of you feel like you’ve been dragged to church, dragged to Bible study, catechism class or Sunday school? How many of you have thought, “The sermons seem to be getting longer.” How many times have we made excuses as to why we don’t want to stay and study the Bible with our brothers and sisters? How many times have we thought, “I know that already, what more could I learn?” How many times have we shuffled up to the chancel to receive our Lord’s body and blood without thinking twice about why we were approaching the table?

Like the Israelites of old, do we sometimes put our trust in this building, that somehow because our warm body shows up every now and then we should “be good” with God? If this is our attitude toward the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, the studying and learning the Word of God, God will not stand for it. Jesus holds his arms out to us, inviting us to find forgiveness, strength, comfort, hope, eternal life in his Word and his Holy Supper. When we despise the Word of God, when we continue to have a poor attitude toward these wonderful means of grace, God threatens us with judgment. (Hebrews 10:24-31)

But just as he did with the people of Judah, God does not leave us without hope. Through Jeremiah he promised them, **“Reform your ways and your actions and obey the LORD your God. Then the LORD will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you.”** (vs13) The truth is, we cannot reform our ways and actions and obey the LORD our God on our own. That is something God has to do. And he has done that: by pointing out our sin, by showing us what we deserve for our sins. We sit here in sorrow over our sins, we repent, and God points us to his Son Jesus, our Savior, who has listened to every Word of his Father and carried out that Word for us.

There is no selective hearing with these words from our Lord. Luke writes, “Then [Jesus] went down to Nazareth with [Mary and Joseph] and was obedient to them.” (2:49) This was Jesus at 12-years-old. How many 12-year-olds can you say this of, all the time? Jesus listened and obeyed all the time. Early during Holy Week, the week that Jesus died, he told his disciples that he was going to suffer and die. He then confessed, “Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say, ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” (John 12:27-28) The Father’s will was that Jesus would listen to every word he said, even taking on human flesh, living a willing life of obedience, and, dying in the place of sinners. Jesus willingly listened and obeyed, out of love for his Father’s will and his great love for you and me. Later that week in the Garden of Gethsemane, on Thursday, the night before he died, Jesus prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” (Luke 22.42) Yes, Jesus listened to the Father’s Word, even when it was difficult, painful, and meant sacrifice.

Listen to what your God has done for you through Jesus Christ, “Whenever we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” (1John 1:7-9) There is no selective hearing for us here. God’s Word is clear. The blood of Christ Jesus cleanses your hearts, your consciences, your whole being before God.

Yes, we receive wonderful blessings because Jesus listened for us. And now God invites us to again listen to him with pure hearts for he promises, “Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and obey it.” (Luke 11.28) Yes, every single word that God caused to be written in this book is good for us to hear, even when it hurts to have our sins pointed out, it’s still good for us. Those words drive us back to the cross. That’s a blessing. Even when we get things wrong and need to be corrected, it’s still good for us. Those words make us realize that we need to learn more. That’s a blessing. But most importantly, God’s Word strengthens you, it comforts you, it builds you up in your faith, which will trust more and more in Jesus, it keeps you focused on that beautiful treasure God tells you is waiting for you at the end of your life – eternity in heaven. God promises it. Listen to him.

I pray that we will always continue to hear and listen God’s Words with eager hearts. Amen.