

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost 5 – June 12th and 15th, 2008

Jeremiah 20:7-13

O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side! Report him! Let's report him!" All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, "Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him."

But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonor will never be forgotten. O LORD Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.

Dear children of our Heavenly Father

This morning we are going to all go job hunting. I want you to look at all the pros and cons, and see if it is a job you would like to take. This is a job that is for all people. There is no age or gender limitations. It is for the youngest child. It is for teenagers. It is for young adults. It is for middle aged adults, and it is also for those of retirement age. It is for both male and female. This is a unique job in that there is only one boss. There is no board of directors. This job is also very simple. All we have to do is take a gift and present it to as many people as we can reach in our lifetime. We don't have to sell anything. We don't have to convince people. From this part of the description you might assume that we are going to be some sort of sales person. In a way that is true, but as we said before we aren't selling anything. All we are doing is presenting something to people free of charge.

Having heard some of the positive aspects of the job, now let's discuss some of the negative parts. Many of the people you present this gift to will completely reject you and the gift you are presenting. Others around you will laugh at you and mock you for doing this job. They will try as hard as they can to make your life miserable. You may at times wonder why you should even continue to do this work. It doesn't seem worth the hassle, but there was one more thing I forget to tell you about this job. It is an important item. Remember I said we had only one boss. This boss promises that he will always be there with us. He will not let harm come upon us. No matter what those around us say or do, our boss will stand behind us 100%. Then you might ask, what is our payment for doing this? The answer to this is that we don't get paid for doing this work. The payment plan is completely different. Our boss gives us our payment before we ever do one thing. Our reward has nothing to do with how much we do or how good we are. It is all given to us because our boss loves us. Knowing this we then are filled with love and out of love we do this job. Is this a job you would like to take? As we look back at this job we begin to notice what this job is that I am speaking about. In reality it is not a job like we think of jobs on this earth. It is a special job which in all actuality is not a job at all and it really is the only "job" that we need to worry about. It is the privilege which God has given to us as sinners and God's children to preach the Gospel to all people. And that will be our theme:

Text: Jeremiah 20:7-13

Theme: God Has Called Us To Preach

- 1. The "Job" is difficult**
- 2. With God's help we can do his work**

The words of our text were written by the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah was one of those men who was called directly by God to go and preach his Word to the Israelites. God came to Jeremiah and told him specifically what his calling would be. It was simple and it was direct. Jeremiah was to go and preach to the people of Israel concerning all their sins and their lives of complete sinfulness. Sounds like a fairly simple calling, but the message he was to deliver was not real comforting. It was the law of God being proclaimed in all of its harshness and severity. He didn't mince words. He told the Israelites what God thought of their lifestyles, and what would happen to them if they continued in their sinful ways. His ministry was difficult in the fact that many of the people he was called to preach to, didn't want to hear his message. They thought they had better things to do, or that this man had no right to tell them what to do and how to do it. In return many of these people resented Jeremiah for having the gall to preach this message of God.

In our text this morning we hear Jeremiah speaking to God. This text is written after Jeremiah was into his ministry for some time. And as we look at these words of Jeremiah, remember what we just said before concerning the nature of his ministry. It was tough and was not very rewarding from an earthly point of view. So what does Jeremiah have to say about this job of his? First of all he lashes out at God saying that God tricked him or enticed him into taking this lousy job as he writes, "**O Lord, you deceived me, and I was deceived. You overpowered me, and prevailed.**" Can you believe what Jeremiah just said! Jeremiah is saying that God tricked him into taking this terrible job. If he would have known what he now knows, he would not have taken this job. Listen to Jeremiah's words concerning his job and what his job has brought him, "**I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me.**" and he writes in later verses, "**All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying perhaps he will be deceived, then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him.**" And to make these words of Jeremiah worse, he goes on to say that all his problems and discomforts come from preaching God's Word, "**So the word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long.**" In other words Jeremiah is telling God that this job sinks. My life would be a whole lot easier and more comfortable, if I did not preach God's Word. Does this sound like a job we would like or consider taking? Does this sound like something we would like to get in to? Probably Not!

If we were to look at this from a purely human point of view, we would say that this is not a job that I would take in a million years, and for this reason Jeremiah had every right to be angry and down on this job. We can sympathize with Jeremiah. We most likely would have said some of the very same things like, "Who needs that type of grief." "Who needs to make that many enemies." "It is too difficult for me." Our human nature agrees with Jeremiah, and we feel sorry for him. We might even wonder why God didn't tell Jeremiah this right from the beginning. In fact we might even begin to see similarities between Jeremiah's ministry and calling and between our ministry and calling. We might see that the reaction we get from preaching the Word is very similar to that of Jeremiah's. We might have experienced first hand the mocking and ridicule that seem to go hand in hand with preaching God's Word. We might see how our "so called" friends are looking for when we slip up and fall into a sin. We see people flat out rejecting the Word we are speaking. We hear those saying we have no right to tell them they are living in sin. We have those who say we are to speak more words of love. To broaden the picture, we might see that the ministry of St. Luke's is hitting the same roadblocks and obstacles that Jeremiah hit. We might find ourselves at times speaking or feeling the same depression from preaching God's Word. We might feel the same feeling of being down on speaking God's Word. We might feel that it is too difficult or that it isn't producing any visible results. We

might get the feeling that it is not worth all the hassle and discomfort it brings into our lives. We might feel that God has abandoned us or tricked us into doing this terrible job of spreading his Word. We might wonder how God could be so mean. We might wonder if it is all worth it.

There is no doubt that preaching God's Word brings some of these earthly problems. Our physical discomforts are there because of sin. The negative thoughts we have about telling others of God's Word are from sin. God has not given us such a bad job to do, but sin has made this job difficult. God never promised a perfect life for us. God never said that since I have called you through faith that all is going to be smooth sailing. God never once told us that everyone was going to believe and accept the words we speak about their salvation. God hasn't fooled us, and he never had that intention. He didn't trick us into taking this job that many call terrible at times. Looking back to Jeremiah we see that Jeremiah definitely was at low point in his ministry, and you know what, we also have low points in our lives. We would be lying to ourselves and to God, if we said that we are always confident. Sin does work in us. Sin does create doubts. Sin does lead us at times to lash out at God. This doesn't make it right, but it does happen. With this in mind we first need to look to God for forgiveness from these wrong ideas, and secondly we need to realize that what we are doing is not really a job. We cannot consider telling others about Christ a job. We cannot treat it like a job. We have been calling it a job up to this point, but it is really a privilege that is presented to all of us.

Jeremiah realized that he was special, not because he was called by God to be a prophet, but that he was special because he was called to faith. In the same way we are special, not because of our outward titles, such as pastor, teacher, Council member or member of St. Luke's. We are all special through faith worked in our heart. We are all special because God's Word has brought us the message of our salvation. We are special, because God has chosen us to be one of his own, even though we are terrible sinners, and we sin every day of our lives. Realizing that we are so special through faith and that God has also granted us the privilege to preach his Word, we see how God wants us to view our "job" of preaching his Word. Jeremiah would be the first to admit that it was wrong to lash out at God for calling him to preach to these terrible Israelites. Jeremiah would be the first to admit that his "job" was the most important thing that he could do for his God. Jeremiah also realized that as a called child of God it was impossible to hold in all that God has done for him, even when his speaking meant ridicule. Jeremiah writes, **"But If I say, I will not mention him or speak any more in his name, his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in, indeed I cannot"** Think about this for a moment! Jeremiah realized that even if he tried to keep quiet about God to keep him from earthly ridicule, he could not. The Word of God in him through faith was burning in his heart. It was overflowing to the point that he could not hold it back.

What a fitting picture this is for us. The ministry that we have is not all that much different than Jeremiah's. We have a mission. We have many enemies. Our words are not always accepted. But as we look at the words of Jeremiah, we once again are brought to the main focus. As a Christian the love of God has filled our heart. It is like a fire burning uncontrollably in us. The love of God gives us all the motivation we need. Our life boils down to 2 "cannot's." Either: 1) We cannot face the ridicule anymore. Or: 2) We cannot keep from telling others about Christ. How many times haven't we tried the first choice, as we tried to cover up our Christianity by not telling anyone we are a Christian? How many of us have tried to bypass all the ridicule that seems to come from preaching God's Word by not speaking up for God? How many of us are experts at covering up our Christianity? Are we weary from trying so hard to hold in our Christianity, or are we weary from working so hard to let the fire out of our hearts? Sometimes we work so hard at making excuses and hiding our Christianity that we begin to forget about Christ and what he has done for us.

Jeremiah finishes this off with the words we always need to look back to. We are going to have rough days. God has told us this. But Jeremiah tells us the words of assurance we need, **"The Lord is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly**

disgraced." God will always be our stronghold. He doesn't give us our "job" and just tell us to go out and do it. He is there with us and promises us that he will conquer our enemies and that they will be disgraced. This does not mean that we won't be mocked. This doesn't mean that everyone we talk to is going to be eager to hear more about God. This doesn't mean that we will never have bad days and wonder if it is all worth it. This doesn't mean that if we knock on 100 doors, we will have 100 people interested in God's Word. But this does mean that we can be assured that God is guiding us and that he has given us the powerful tool of his Word which will not fail. How can we fail with God and his Word working for us? Let the joy that we have fill us and overflow from our mouths and in our lives. Jeremiah was having a very bad day, week or year, and we may be having a bad day, week or year, but let us listen to Jeremiah's words that are positive and joyful words, **"Sing praise to the Lord! Give praise to the Lord! He rescues the life of the needy, from the hands of the wicked."** Amen.