

“God Does Not Deceive”

Jeremiah 20:7-13

My typical Monday morning begins with me reading through the three appointed lessons for the coming week. And then I think about what direction I want to go with my sermon, was there anything that jumped out at me as being especially relevant, or perhaps corresponds to something we have been talking about in one of our Bible classes, or in the news of the day.

This past Monday, I read one line from Jeremiah and I couldn't get past it. “O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived.” I did a quick search, and to my knowledge, I have never preached on this text. How is that possible? Who knows how many times I have read those words in my life, but this week, those words of Jeremiah jumped out at me. Those words need some clarification.

Perhaps I had never noticed this little phrase because it was just a new translation and we only recently switched over to the ESV of the Bible. So I got out my old NIV I used for years with the binding coming apart and the cover falling off and Jeremiah still said, “O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived.”

So we ask the question, “What does this mean?” After digging into the root word, the translation isn't bad, it just requires a little clarity. This is the same word used when Delilah deceives Samson and entices him into

telling the secret of his great strength. But it does not always, or even generally mean something sinister.

The Lord persuaded Jeremiah to take up the mantle as a prophet of God and it was not quite what he thought he was signing up for. Jeremiah is saying, “I was gullible, and you got me.” Jeremiah was a teenager when God called him and touched him on his lips and said, “Behold, I have put My words into your mouth.”

God did not lie to Jeremiah. God did not “deceive” him with false promises. God just didn’t tell him what the next 40 years of ministry was going to be like. Jeremiah’s job was to speak out and say very unpopular things. His job was to go to the kings of Judah and tell them that violence and destruction is coming. And he was mocked and laughed at and people to whom God was sending him did not want to listen to him.

It is appropriate that we hear these words from Jeremiah this weekend. June 25 is the anniversary of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession. In the year 1530, Luther’s protégé Philip Melanchthon put together 28 articles of faith which were presented to the Emperor at the Diet of Augsburg. Luther could not attend because he was declared an outlaw and would be captured or killed.

The princes and other leaders who signed the Augsburg Confession arrived at great personal risk. The Emperor told them that the Lutheran preachers were not allowed to preach and that all of those present were going to join him that week in worshipping “in the Roman manner.” George Margrave of Brandenburg (that is, the prince/duke of Brandenburg) advancing nearer to the Emperor said, “before I would allow anyone to take from me the Word of God and ask me to deny my God, I will kneel and let him strike off my head!”

The Emperor is shocked and surprised. He had most likely assumed that these princes from northern Germany were playing politics and using the fact that the Ottoman Turks (the Muslim army) was approaching the gates of Vienna, Austria. He thought they were just taking the opportunity to carve out a little more power for themselves, as politicians would typically do. And George of Brandenburg let Emperor Charles see in no uncertain terms that this is about faith. This is about the Word of God being more important to me than my head. This display of faith, this bold witness of the Gospel caused the Emperor to respond without using his interpreter in whatever broken German he knew and said, "No Prince, no head! No head!

Emperor Charles did not want to fight. He wanted a political compromise. George of Brandenburg bore witness that this is a fight. This is a fight for truth. The truth of the cross of Jesus Christ and what He has done for you is worth fighting for. The Word of God is worth fighting for. It is of more value to George of Brandenburg than his own head.

We look at Jeremiah. We look at men like George of Brandenburg. We need to look in the mirror. In Baptism, God has called you out of your old life into something completely different. The faith created in Baptism is worth celebrating, but it is something that we all too often take for granted. At your Baptism, you were probably dressed in fancy clothes; there was probably even a cake shared by friends and family.

But becoming a theologian of the cross, living under the cross of Jesus Christ is not a life of fancy clothes and cake. There are no false promises given in Baptism. You have not been deceived, but you have been persuaded into a life which requires you to believe and confess unpopular things. We are mocked throughout all forms of the media. We

are laughed at for acknowledging God as the Author of life. Going all the way back to St. Paul, the world around us thinks of the cross as foolishness.

Be thankful that we still live in a society where we are not forced to make a public confession that Christ and the Word of God are of more value than your head. We see in the news that there are Christians who do not have that luxury.

We are simply mocked and scoffed at. How do we protect ourselves from the mocking and scoffing? We don't. We read in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says, "So everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father who is in heaven."

Part of our calling as baptized children of God is to acknowledge and confess our faith in God publicly. There is no such thing as being a "secret Christian." "Whoever denies Me before men, I will deny before My Father in heaven." You do not want that for yourself. And you do not want to be silent around others who do not share the joy which we have. That's not good for them.

Jeremiah found that, when he tried to just keep quiet and let them go their own way down the path to destruction, the Word of the Lord was like a fire burning within him. He could not be silent. The Word of God must be proclaimed. It is like when the Pharisees told Jesus to silence His apostles. Jesus said, "If they were silent, then even the rocks would cry out."

The Word of the Lord must be proclaimed. "What you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops." And "before I would allow anyone to take from me the Word of God and ask me to deny my God, I will kneel and let him strike off my head!" Amen.