

Jer. 20:7-13 ORLC 6-21-26 “The Cost of Compassion”

When reading Scripture, in order for the hearers (I say hearers, because Scripture historically was always read out loud); in order for the hearers to understand what was really happening, it seemed that there was always a “back story.” You have to understand the back story – we often call this “context.” Or as Paul Harvey would say, “And now, the rest of the story.”

Last week, I did not preach on the Gospel reading, but in Matthew’s account of the early days of Jesus’ ministry, we are told that Jesus showed compassion. He had compassion for people – for individual people. And, as I have told you before, the word compassion (in the Greek) has to do with exposing your most delicate internal organs. We simply say that we “pour our heart out” for someone. Regardless, actual compassion always comes with a cost.

Jeremiah understands this. Our Old Testament reading from Jeremiah begins, “O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived;” that is a verse that needs some context. Jeremiah is not accusing God of acting underhandedly toward him. He is telling God that when he was appointed by God to be His prophet that he didn’t quite know the fullness of the job description, or how compelled he would be to bear the cost of being a prophet of God. You get a taste of it in our Old Testament reading. God’s Word and His Name was a burning fire within him. Read all of Jeremiah and Lamentations if you want the full context.

Jeremiah's ministry to the people of Israel was not easy. There was a cost. Then again, God did not promise that his ministry would be easy. In fact, God is very specific that the kings of Israel will fight against him, but he tells Jeremiah, "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord" [Jer. 1:8]. God is upfront with him. It's just that Jeremiah didn't realize how much anger there would be from the kings, from which the Lord would need to deliver him. He did not understand how much his ministry would cost.

As we read Romans 6:12-23 in our Epistle reading, we really don't get the full picture of what Paul is saying without the context of the rest of Romans, especially Romans 6:1-11. The beginning of Romans 6 is all about how Baptism buries you with Jesus, kills you (your Old Adam) with His death on the cross, and raises you (by faith alone) with His resurrection to a new life in Christ in His church on earth and on the Last Day will raise you in the resurrection to life eternal.

Romans 6 verses 12 and following ask the question, "Since I know this, what does this mean for me here and now in this life?" Paul says: this is what it means. You are still a sinner; you still see your sin; but because your sin is dead in Jesus, and your sin is going to remain in the grave when you rise from the dead. Therefore, don't let your sin, your Old Adam, tell you how to live your life now.

Don't let sin reign in your mortal body. Don't let sin be the thing that decides what truth is and what falsehood is.

My Old Adam wants to do something that God says is sin. I am baptized into Jesus; I know my sin is paid for, crucified, and buried with Him. I know that my sin is evil; it is bad; and I am going to rise with Him and be separated from that sin (as far as the east is from the west, Scripture says) once and for all in the future. Therefore, in the here and now, I need to recognize the cost of discipleship and reject the passions, the desires of my sin. How can I look at what God says is evil and call it good when the blood of Jesus has paid the full cost of the guilt of my sin?

Paul says, let God's Word be your guide. "Don't obey your passions." Don't let what you want (that is, don't let what your Old Adam wants) be the guide for conducting your life within the church and society, as if you are the master of your own destiny. Instead, submit to the Word of God. And, as Luther says in the catechism, "the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that the new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever."

This is the life of God's baptized children. Every morning, rise to live before your neighbors as the eternally redeemed perfect person that you are in the

eyes of God having been forgiven by Him. That is who you are, so Paul says act like it. But all of this is within the greater context of his letter to the Romans.

In Romans 3, Paul clearly lays out how far from righteousness and perfection we are. We get to Romans 7 and he is quite clear that this fight is not an easy thing. Far from it. You are not going to be perfect. I am certainly not going to be perfect. Paul says of himself, “I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate . . . I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out . . . For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. . . Wretched man that I am.” Paul does call himself the “chief of sinners,” as I also mentioned a couple weeks ago.

The end of this will be a return to the beginning, a return to repentance, and our confession “I am a poor, miserable sinner.” I am in need of God’s grace, and I am covered by God’s grace. However, knowing that you can’t eliminate all sin, but God has forgiven all sin is not an excuse that it is OK for me then to do as I please – because God’s got me covered. It is not OK for me to do harm to my neighbor or to hate him for any reason – even when you perceive that you have been wronged; even when you know and have evidence that you have been wronged. Not only are you not to hate them, but you are to have compassion for them, and yes it comes with a cost.

Nowhere in Scripture is the life of a Christian said to be easy. Jesus says, “The broad and easy road leads to destruction . . . Desire to enter through the narrow gate.” God told Jeremiah that the kings of Israel will fight against him and his ministry will not be easy, yet God sent him to the kings of Israel. God has told you that the devil, the world, and your sinful nature (your Old Adam) will fight against you and your life in Christ’s church will not be easy. In fact, Jesus says in our Gospel reading that you will be hated by all because of Me.

And we often feel like Jeremiah and say, “O Lord, you have deceived me,” this is not what I thought a baptized life in Christ was going to be. But when we feel that way, and we feel the devil’s hot breath on our neck and the world closing in around us and our own sinful passions welling up from within, remember God’s word to Jeremiah as He called him to be His prophet, “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord” [Jer. 1:8]. Do not be afraid of them. As Jesus says, “Do not fear the one who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”

Your context, your back story is Romans 6:1-11. Baptism buries you with Jesus, kills you (your Old Adam) with His death on the cross, and raises you (by faith alone) with His resurrection to a new life in Christ in His church on earth and on the Last Day will raise you in the resurrection to life eternal. Thanks be to God that Christ our Lord was willing to pay the cost of compassion. Amen.