

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost 5 – July 10th and 13th, 2014

Jeremiah 20:7-13 (NIV – 1984)

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

Perhaps some of you have received an e-mail similar to this one:

Hello:

I am Pen R Wan an underwriter with Pheim Unit Capital Trusts Bhd Malaysia. Have contacted you with the hope of getting you to act as trustee in clearance of forty million USD fixed income deposit and to subsequently invest the funds. You earn commission for acting as my trustee in clearance of the fixed income deposit. I will urgently need your full names, address and phone number to regularize on the funds as the new recipient with the financial institution where the fixed income deposit is presently domicile. Note that the fixed income deposit has to be cleared before the ending of this quarter of the financial fiscal year 2014. I will enumerate further upon your response. Looking forward to working with you. Sincerely, Pen R Wan gwinters56@yahoo.com

I receive at least a few of these types of e-mails every week in my spam folder. Why I get them, I don't know, but it's obvious that this e-mail is an attempt to scam me and the other “undisclosed recipients” who received the same. Everywhere we look, it seems that someone or another is trying to scam us or deceive us. Whether it's the televangelist who promises financial prosperity if we support their “ministry,” or the grand prize winner mailings that we receive that promise us a huge payoff if we only give them our personal information for verification purposes; people all over this world are trying to deceive us. It's something that we expect from a sinful world. It's something that we're certainly prepared for. It's something that we would expect from the Devil or Satan, whose very name means “liar or deceiver.”

But to see and hear what Jeremiah says in verse 7 of chapter 20 is something different. It's something we would not expect to hear, especially about our God. **“O Lord, you deceived me,”** is what Jeremiah says. The Lord deceiving someone? Is it possible? What is Jeremiah talking about? May the Lord grant us an open heart and mind to hear this Word of God and to understand what he says to us today. May we, after mining the depths of God's revelation to us, may we joyfully say,

Theme: O Lord, Thank You For Deceiving Us!

- 1. The world attacks us**
- 2. God's Word fills us**
- 3. God protects us**

Jeremiah is considered one of the major prophets of the Old Testament. He was the son of a priest. He became a prophet of God while he was quite young. His ministry spanned the last six kings of Judah. It is about 120 years later than that of Isaiah, falling into the so-called evil period, when a flood of idolatry, immorality, and every kind of injustice and violence had engulfed everything. The people of Judah had hardened their hearts before the Lord leading to their inevitable doom.

Though the sweeping reform of worship instituted by Josiah was felt even in the Northern tribes, it could bring about true repentance neither among the apostate people nor their rulers, neither among priests nor princes. The subsequent kings, especially Jehoiakim, strove to outdo the nobles of the court as well as the people at large in all kinds of wickedness. They had nothing but scorn and hatred for the Word of God, and persecution for the prophets who spoke that Word.

Jeremiah's mission was to preach repentance. But because of the hardening of the people, the messenger of repentance often becomes a resounding gong of judgment. Arguably, Jeremiah's ministry was the most difficult and most thankless of all the prophets. And it's that little nugget that helps us to understand how Jeremiah could have ever said such a thing as we find in our lesson this morning. Listen again as Jeremiah cries out to the Lord. **“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.”**

Jeremiah had endured almost unimaginable suffering during his many years of ministry. Just before he spoke the words before us this morning, Jeremiah had spent a day or so in the stocks. He had been physically beaten. But perhaps even more damaging was the mocking by his countrymen. All of this had driven Jeremiah to the point of quitting. He felt that he could no longer endure all that came with being faithful to God's Word and he was ready to just be quiet. So, he says to the Lord, **“O LORD, you deceived me...”**

When we hear that word “deceive,” we automatically think about the scam artist, the crook, the liar who are trying to cheat us out of something or are trying to bring us harm. How could Jeremiah say such a thing about the LORD? Was Jeremiah really accusing God of tricking him or scamming him into being his prophet? Looking at Jeremiah's life may lead you to think it's not that far out of the realm of possibility, the word translated as “deceive” really has a different connotation than to scheme or scam. That Hebrew word really means to persuade or entice. God had persuaded Jeremiah to be his prophet by the power of His Word.

That Word of God persuaded Jeremiah to believe in God and his promises. Being God's prophet is not something Jeremiah could have or would have chosen to do. In fact, Jeremiah did the best he could to persuade the Lord that he wasn't up to the task. But the Lord “deceived” him. He persuaded him, he enticed him by his promises that his Word would work. For many in Israel, that meant that their hearts would continue to reject the Word and they would be hardened in their unbelief. For some, it meant that they would repent and believe. The only problem was that in Jeremiah's mind, the Word wasn't working as God had promised. Instead, the Word was bringing Jeremiah insult and reproach all day long. The people to whom Jeremiah was called to preach the Word were making his life miserable.

My friends, maybe we haven't experienced the persecution of the world to the same level of Jeremiah, but the world we live in is opposed to God's Word. We are ridiculed, we are mocked, and we are opposed. It may not be as public and open as it was for Jeremiah, but that doesn't mean it's not there. In fact, sometimes the underlying, hidden opposition is harder to face because we can't address it head on. More and more we are labeled as the “extreme right” – those conservatives who believe in the Bible. More and more we are facing a nation that doesn't put God and his will first – in fact God often times is not even on people's list at all. More and more we are labeled as hateful and exclusive for preaching the full counsel of God. What are we to do – throw our arms up like Jeremiah and say what are we supposed to do with all of this sin around us?

In very much the same way as God encouraged Jeremiah, God persuades us by his Word to be his disciples, to go out and share his Word. He tells us that his Word is going to work and that it won't return to

him empty. And there are plenty of examples where we can see that happening. But then there are those times when it seems like we're paddling upstream, that despite our best efforts the Word doesn't seem to be getting the job done. So what do we do then? Do we call God on the carpet and say like Jeremiah, "God you have deceived us!" Do we look to things other than the Word as ways to bring people into a relationship with God? Do we like Jeremiah think about throwing in the towel and giving up? God forgive us for those sinful thoughts and attitudes! So what do we do? Listen to what Jeremiah says.

"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... 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."

So thoroughly had God "deceived" Jeremiah that he couldn't help but preach God's Word! When he tried to hold it in, when he tried to keep silent, that Word burned in his heart like a fire. He said that he became weary of holding it in and in fact he couldn't do it. So deceived he was by God's Word that he had to speak it! And so he did. He spoke of the Lord's protection for his messengers. He spoke of the Lord's ultimate victory over his enemies. He spoke of the Lord's righteousness that probes the hearts of all mankind bringing justice to the righteous and judgment to the wicked. And most importantly, just verses after he accused the Lord of deceiving him and just a verse before he asks God to curse the day he was born, Jeremiah breaks out into a doxology of praise. He praises the Lord for rescuing the needy.

Jesus, our Savior, has rescued us needy ones from ourselves, from the world, and from the Devil himself. He has given us his perfect life as a garment of righteousness so that when God probes our hearts he sees his Son. He has given us the ultimate victory of sin, death, and the Devil, by his atoning work on the cross. And most amazing of all, he has somehow persuaded me to believe that he did all of this for me as an act of his grace. My Savior and yours has enticed us all to be part of his family. That's something we never would have chosen to do on our own nor could we. And now he's deceived us into sharing that message of grace with others. But it's a message that is often met with opposition. It's a message that can cause the messenger hardship. Jesus said as much to his disciples in our gospel lesson for this morning. But we've been deceived. Like Jeremiah, we can't hide the light of the gospel. We can't keep it in. If we try, it burns inside us, it makes us weary of holding it in. The good news of God's gospel is not meant to be held in, it's meant to be shared. And when we share it, we have God's promise that it will work, not as we think is best, but in his way and on his terms.

Jeremiah withstood opposition that we can only imagine. And through it all he remained faithful to his calling. How? It was a gift from God. But that gift came through God's Word. It came from God's promise way back in chapter 1, **"They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.**" God has given us the same promise to be with us and to bless us. If we're going to remain faithful to our calling to share God's Word in a world that is just as hostile as it was in the days of Jeremiah, then we to are going to need that God-given gift of courage. And we will have it when we simply preach the Word and trust the Lord will take care of the results.

I bet you never thought you'd be thankful for being deceived, but that's exactly what we are this morning, aren't we? We are thankful beyond comprehension that God persuaded us away from a life of sin to a life of righteousness. We are thankful that God enticed us away from a hopeless existence in trying to earn our own salvation and instead led us to trust in his grace alone. We are thankful more than we could ever say that he has deceived us away from the father of lies and a home in hell, but instead has a room in heaven with our name on it. O Lord, Thank Your For Deceiving Us! May we use your word to persuade others of the truth that Jeremiah so faithfully preached and that the world so desperately needs! Amen.